THE TYRANT

An episode in the career of Cesare Borgia in Four Acts

By

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AN EPISODE IN THE CAREER OF CESARE BORGIA

A Play in Four Acts

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RAFAEL SABATINI

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TO

MATHESON LANG

PREFACE

It is demanded of the writer of fiction, whether novelist or dramatist, that the events he sets forth shall be endowed with the quality of verisimilitude. What he writes need not necessarily be true; but, at least, it must seem to be true, so that it may carry that conviction without which interest fails to be aroused. The historian appears to lie under no such restraining obligation. Whilst avowed Fiction is scornfully rejected when it transcends the bounds of human probability, alleged Fact would sometimes seem to be the more assured of enduring acceptance the more flagrantly impossible and irreconcilable are its details. And this not merely by the uninformed, who are easily imposed upon by the label of History, but even by those whose activities would appear to connote a degree of mental training at least sufficient to dispel the credulity that lies ever cheek by jowl with ignorance.

Were it otherwise one of the criticisms of this play which found utterance in some quarters on its first presentation in London would not have been that it "whitewashes" Cesare Borgia, that it distorts historical records for the purposes of the theatre, and that—either out of venality, or, perhaps, ignorance—it presents a Duke of Valentinois who in nothing resembles the Duke of Valentinois of sober history.

The Duke of Valentinois of sober history is evidently conceived by these particular critics to have been a gentleman with no occupation in life other than the pursuit of murder, incest, and other similar avocations, a prince

with so much poisoning and poignarding to do in the ordinary way of business that no time remained him for any of the activities common to a fifteenth-century ruler; in short, a Duke of Valentinois as ludicrous and impossible in fiction as he would have been ludicrous and impossible in fact.

What I mean by this is that the argument of "white-wash" would appear to rest, if it rests upon anything at all, upon the following syllogism: We have been taught that Cesare Borgia in the course of his career murdered, or procured the murder of a number of persons, and that he practised various unmentionable abominations; the Cesare Borgia in this play does not commit or procure, in the course of the events it reflects, the murder of anybody, nor is he shown engaged in vices of any peculiar depravity; therefore this Cesare Borgia is not the Cesare Borgia of history.

The matter would not be worth mentioning at all if it were not for the undeniable circumstance that those who take this view have behind them the authority, if not of historians generally, at least of a certain school of historians, who derive their histories from those of Guicciardini, Giovio, Matarazzo, and a host of others, who, through some four centuries, have been busily re-editing and amplifying the grotesque and sensational tale of Borgia turpitude.

This school—ignoring all contemporary evidences of a refutatory character—represents Cesare Borgia as a monster of infamy, a devil incarnate, a gross sensualist, an inhuman scoundrel without a single redeeming feature. He is accused (without a rag of tenable evidence, either of fact or of motive, upon which to hang the accusation) of the murder of his own brother the Duke of Gandia;

he murdered, we are told, his brother-in-law Alfonso of Aragon; he attempted the murder of his brother-in-law Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro; he poisoned his cousin and friend the Cardinal Giovanni Borgia; he stabbed Pedro Caldes in the very arms of the Pope, whither the unfortunate chamberlain had fled for shelter from his fury; and he is charged with procuring in several ways the death of many others. And these are the least of his alleged crimes. In the same light and irresponsible fashion, without the support of any substantiating evidence, with a cynical disregard of the abundant evidence that might be employed in refutation, he is, together with all his family, accused of wholesale incest and other abominable practices.

Of such a character and quality are the details we are afforded of his misdeeds that if, instead of being the creation of writers who described themselves as historians, Cesare Borgia had been the creation of an avowed romancer, he would have been slain for all time by the ridicule of the public; for such is the conception's utter lack of verisimilitude that it belongs, not to the realm of sensational melodrama, but to Bedlam.

Elsewhere, and at length—in a "Life of Cesare Borgia," which is quite frankly a brief for the defence—I have dealt critically and in detail with this curious page of Italian history, examining the sources and applying to the available evidence the ordinary tests. So much would be out of place here, nor is it necessary for my immediate aims.

For the moment, and for the purposes of my present argument, let us admit that the Duke of Valentinois perpetrated all the fantastic crimes and practised all the equally fantastic abominations with which he is charged.

From the pages of Guicciardini, written in retirement at his villa at Arcetri, a quarter of a century after Cesare Borgia's death, you will hardly gather that the Duke had any other occupations. And it is curious—in itself a proof of that deliberate malice with which Guicciardini is branded by such contemporaries as Sebastiano Macci—that whilst none of the things which the Florentine historian relates of Cesare Borgia are of the slightest historical significance, he omits almost entirely to mention those deeds and achievements which had so wide and lasting an effect upon Italian politics, and which are the only matters it is a sincere historian's function to record.

It is elsewhere that you must seek the details of the admirably conducted conquest and reorganization of the Romagna, details which reveal Valentinois as a leader of great military skill, a brilliant strategist and an enlightened administrator. Still more admirable does he appear as a ruler over those same Romagna states once he had wrested them from the turbulent, rapacious despots under whom they had previously groaned. He restored order out of revolting chaos, established courts for the proper dispensation of justice, so that persons and property could depend upon that protection which they had not known for generations.

The tyrants he deposed went raging up and down Italy, inveighing against him, dubbing him antichrist and charging him with all manner of unutterable wickedness, seeking actively to enlist for his destruction the hostility which his growing power and boundless ambition had already aroused in the great states of Venice, Naples, Milan and Florence. But the people of the tyrannies upon which he made war hailed this antichrist as their deliverer, and they afforded him such ready and loyal

service that in more instances than one his conquests, as a consequence, were bloodlessly effected.

These facts—unlike those matters of his personal turpitude—are to-day beyond the realm of controversy. They are accepted by the most hostile of Borgia critics. Even Gregorovius, most bitter and unrestrained of anti-papal historians, finds it necessary to pay the following tribute to a man of whom he can say little else that is favourable :

> It is undeniable that his government was energetic and good ; for the first time the Romagna enjoyed peace and was rid of her vampires. In the name of Cesare justice was administered by Antonio di Monte Sansovino, president of the Ruota of Cesena, a man universally beloved.

Among the many contemporary pen-portraits that survive we have the following in a letter to his government from Bishop Soderini, Ambassador of Florence to the Duke, written at a time when the relations between Cesare Borgia and the Florentine Republic were none too friendly :

> This lord is very magnificent and splendid, and so spirited in feats of arms that there is nothing so great but that it must seem small to him. In the pursuit of glory and the acquisition of dominions he never rests, and he knows neither danger nor fatigue. He moves so swiftly that he descends upon a place before it is known that he has set out for it. He knows how to make himself beloved of his soldiers, and he has in his service the best men in Italy. These things render him victorious and formidable, and to these is

> yet to be added his constant good fortune. He argues with such sound reason that to dispute with him would be a long affair. His wit and eloquence never fail him.

Other pen-portraits confirming this exist in abundance, some emanating from friendly, some from hostile sources. They find in the pages of Gregorovius's "Geschichte der Stadt Rom" the following summary:

> Nature had been prodigal of gifts to Cesare Borgia. Like Tiberius of old he was the most beautiful man of his day, with the shapely vigorous body of an athlete. He held his senses in subjection to an intellect that was acute and cold. He exercised a magnetic attraction towards women; but still more formidable was the magnetic attraction which he exercised towards men, disarming them. Acute and perspicacious, swift as lightning in his actions, endowed with great knowledge of men, he was remorseless, using virtue and vice indifferently to attain his ends.

Finally, as a lasting monument to Cesare Borgia's achievements, energy, industry and varied intellectual gifts, we have "The Prince," that grammar of statecraft from the pen of Niccolò Macchiavelli, inspired by his close observation of the methods adopted by Cesare Borgia, who is held up throughout as the model upon which princes should frame their conduct.

Enough will have been said to show that anyone approaching the study of this subject for the purposes of the theatre will, if he probe deeply enough into history, find himself confronted with two Cesare Borgias. There is, on the one hand, the able soldier, the astute statesman,

the physically and intellectually gifted prince of those eye-witnesses Soderini, Macchiavelli, and some others. And there is, on the other hand, the depraved voluptuary, the bloodthirsty murderer, the unmitigated scoundrel of the compilations of Guicciardini and Giovio.

The popular conception of the Borgia family is based upon the latter, or, rather, upon their extensive elaboration in a seventeenth-century novel by Gregorio Leti. This novel has been rendered well known by the adaptations of it which Dumas (in his "Crimes Célèbres") and Victor Hugo (in his "Lucrezia Borgia") have given to the world. Dumas did not consider it necessary to acknowledge the source of his own romance. Victor Hugo acknowledged his borrowing from that crude, ill-constructed, ill-written and salacious piece of fiction, by putting it forward as a serious authoritative historical document, and so imposed upon a world that knew no better.

If I had attempted to write of Cesare Borgia a biographical play I must of necessity have constructed it either upon the parent story in Guicciardini, together with its lusty well-developed child in Gregorio Leti, its still lustier grandchildren in Dumas and Hugo and the subsequent and ubiquitous great-grandchildren, or else upon the very definite and very different—though by no means singular—conception which I derived from my own independent researches.

If I had adopted the first of these alternatives, I should have been guilty of an insincerity which would have brought its own punishment. Moreover, the result would inevitably have been a melodrama so flagrantly absurd that any intelligent audience visually beholding the materialization of that farrago of ill-invented rubbish—with whatever art it might have been presented—would

have laughed it off the stage. In that way, it is true, I might have rendered valuable historical service by destroying for all time, by complete exposure, the Borgia myth.

If I had adopted the second alternative I should have been under the necessity of constructing that very difficult and tedious thing, a controversial drama. I should have been accused—assuming that I could have found production for such a play—of departing from the dramatist's proper function of entertaining an audience, for the purpose of expounding an historical thesis. And since, in any case, the limitations of the theatre would never have permitted me fully to develop the arguments through which my thesis must be expounded, persons who study their history *ad hoc* in the Encyclopædia Britannica and similar books of concise and summarized reference might indeed have been justified in raising against me the cry of "whitewash."

I mention this merely in passing, because the writing of a biographical play on Cesare Borgia or any other historical character would not at any time attract me. The career of an active man of achievements, even when it is so brief a career as Cesare Borgia's, can hardly prove of interest when telescoped into the compass of a three-hours' entertainment. More commendable seems the method of reflecting the man's personality and psychology in a single incident that shall be typical of the activities of his career. The incident need not be entirely real, although to have any true historical value it must be set in circumstances of reality and at least amid happenings that are actually true. Moreover, in this way it should be possible—or so I fancied—entirely to avoid all controversy. I would present the Cesare Borgia of Soderini and Macchiavelli, without, however, urging anything that should contradict what has been written by Guicciardini and

Giovio. In other words, I would show Cesare Borgia moving through a set of circumstances that should reveal his daring, his resource, his splendour, his athletic physical beauty, his personal magnetism, his intellectual acuteness, his ruthlessness, his merciless ambition, his typical fifteenth-century cruelty and his remorseless egotism, whilst at the same time in nothing suggesting that he could not in a different set of circumstances have perpetrated any or all of the villainies with which the popular conception charges him.

Therefore, I was careful that no character in the play save Cesare Borgia himself should have a single good word to say of Cesare Borgia, or anything that might have sounded like an argument in his favour. And the very explanations which, in passing, Cesare himself offers of the horrible tales that are told of him in Italy are the explanations which he would have offered—which we know, in fact, that he did offer—whether those tales were true or not. The actual historical incidents employed in the construction of the story are incidents about which there is no controversy between the two schools; whilst if Cesare Borgia is endowed with the attributes which Soderini and Macchiavelli admired in him, yet the invented set of circumstances and his remorseless conduct in them are such as Guicciardini might not have hesitated to include in his history, if they had been invented instead—like so many other political slanders—by some Roman, Venetian or Neapolitan contemporary.

In this way it seemed to me possible to satisfy my own conceptions without doing violence to popular belief.

But since in spite of this care with which I sought to steer a justifiable middle course between conflicting schools, I have not escaped the charge of having whitewashed

Cesare Borgia, it seems to me that I may have done here better historical service than I set out to do. For the explanation should lie in the fact that it is impossible to combine in one person the gifted prince of Soderini and Macchiavelli with the brutal scoundrel of Guicciardini and his literary successors.

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their speaking)

Panthasilea degli Speranzoni	
Giulia	
Count Guido degli Speranzoni	Tyrant of Solignola.
Santafiora	A Condottiero.
D'Aldi	Of the Council of Ten of Solignola.
Gianluca della Pieve	A Patrician of Assisi.
Del Campo, Paviano	Of the Council of Solignola.
Seneschal of Solignola	
Prince Ercole Sinibaldi	Envoy of Venice.
A Swiss Doorkeeper	
Ramirez, Micheletto da Corella, Scipione	Condottieri in the service of Valentinois.
Niccolò Macchiavelli	Secretary of State of Florence.
Capello	Orator of Venice.
A Chamberlain	
Agabito Gherardi	Secretary to Valentinois.
Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois and Romagna	
Gino	A peasant.
Giovanni	Seneschal of the Pieve Palace.

CHARACTERS

Gasparo	Orator of Mantua.
Mariano	Orator of Ferrara.
Two Councillors of Solignola	
Three Ladies of Assisi	
Four Gentlemen of Assisi	
Four Swiss Guards	(Silent parts.)
Four Men-at-Arms	
Two Monks	
Two Lackeys	
Two Pages	
Cardinal Remolino	
Ferrante	A Condottiero

SCENES

Act I. A Hall in the Castle of Solignola.

Act II. The Antechamber in the Communal Palace at Assisi.

Act III. A room in the Pieve Palace, Assisi.

Act IV. As Act I.

The Action takes place in the Spring of 1503. Between Acts I. and II. and Acts II. and III. a week elapses in each case; between Acts III. and IV. a day elapses.

CAST OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

At the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, on the 9th March, and subsequently at the New Theatre, London, on the 18th March, 1925.

Panthasilea degli Speranzoni	Miss Isobel Elsom.
Giulia	Miss Nona Wynne.
Guido degli Speranzoni	Mr. Wilfrid Walter.
Santafiora	Mr. Douglas Ross.
D'Aldi	Mr. A. W. Tyrer.
Gianluca della Pieve	Mr. Frank Vosper.
Del Campo	Mr. Ernest Bodkin.
Paviano	Mr. Anderson Melrose.
Seneschal of Solignola	Mr. D. Morrison.
Prince Ercole Sinibaldi	Mr. Edmund Willard.
Mariano	Mr. Walter Lake.
Capello	Mr. Ernest Bodkin.
Swiss Soldier	Mr. Donald Wolfit.
Niccolò Macchiavelli	Mr. Leonard Shepherd.
Ramirez	Mr. Henry C. Hewitt.
Scipione	Mr. Owen Cassidy.
Chamberlain	Mr. Walter Menpes.
Micheletto da Corella	Mr. R. Campbell Fletcher.
Cardinal Remolino	Mr. William Magill Martyn.
Agabito Gherardi	Mr. Cecil Cameron.
Cesare Borgia	Mr. Matheson Lang.
Giovanni	Mr. Alec S. Clunes.

ACT I

ACT I

A Hall in the Castle of Solignola.

A spacious chamber on the first floor of the castle, severe in tone. Its grey stone walls show bare here and there between the strips of sombre-hued tapestries with which in the main they are hung ; the ceiling is crudely frescoed. The main entrance—double-doors of square design, massive of timber, fortified by metal—are in the back flat, a little to the right of the middle. They open directly on to an external stair-head with a shallow parapet, whence steps descend, left, to the ground level below. The farther buildings of the wide court-yard are seen on the backcloth when this door is open.

The loggia is in the same flat, to the left. Its ceiling is carried on seven slender pillars (two at each side and three at the back) delicately carved and painted. These rise from a parapet rather higher than that of the stair-head, and the outlook thence is upon distant hills. Against this parapet a bench is set, rather like a window-seat, equipped with loose leather cushions.

There is a door low down in the right flat, and opposite to this a great cowled fireplace, decorated by armorial bearings in relief and coloured. The floor is of stone, grey and unrelieved. It may be strewn with rushes. Below this a heavy table is set squarely across, rather low and a little to the left of midstage. Five stools are placed about this table, three above, two below, and an armchair at each end. A carved and gilded throne-like chair stands R.C. against the wall at back, between doors and loggia, on a small dais. There is an armchair with cushioned seat against flat R.

At Rise of Curtain *the armchair by the hearth is occupied by* Count Guido degli Speranzoni, *a vigorous man of fifty, with grizzled hair and a shaven, aquiline face, strong and crafty. He is well dressed, without fripperies, his exterior, like his bearing, marking him for a soldier rather than a man of courts. He sits brooding, chin in palm.*

On the bench in the loggia sits PANTHASILEA DEGLI SPERANZONI, *a beautiful woman of twenty-three, regal of mien and carriage, dressed simply, yet with a certain richness betokening her rank; thus there are jewels in her girdle and in the gold network that confines her hair.*

On a cushion at her feet sits GIULIA. *Younger than Panthasilea, she is by contrast almost child-like. She fills the office of companion and lady-in-waiting to Count Guido's daughter.*

It is the afternoon of a day in early Spring.

PANTHASILEA *is singing, accompanying herself upon an archlute, and the first stanza of her song may be heard before the curtain actually rises:*

Life is an anguish grown, a source of tears,
For Love lies stark and cold on his last bed,
A round of broken days and empty years
When hope is dead.

There is no joy in song, nor solace yet
In all the tears demanding to be shed;
Vainly we sigh our longings, vainly fret
When hope is dead.

Thus in Life's fetters still a pris'ner held,
Eating of hopelessness the bitter bread,
Waiting . . .

[*Her utterance becomes choked by tears. It breaks off on a sob.* GUIDO *starts up in solicitude, whilst* GIULIA, *rising to her knees, puts her arm about Panthasilea.*

GIULIA: Monna Lea! Monna Lea!

GUIDO: Panthasilea, my child! (*He goes quickly up to her.*) Why will you make songs to afflict you?

[PANTHASILEA *rises, and relinquishes the lute to* GIULIA. *She controls herself.*

PANTHASILEA: Have patience, Father. Forgive me. You know my loss. . . .

GUIDO (*in fond impatience*): But these melancholy songs. . . .

PANTHASILEA: The tongue will touch where the tooth aches.

[*He sets an arm affectionately about her shoulders, and together they come slowly down.*

PANTHASILEA (*to* GIULIA): Go, leave me, child. I will call you if I need you. (*To* GUIDO.) It is solacing to weep sometimes. Mostly I think my heart is dead—dead, and buried in Pesaro with my poor murdered Pietro.

[GIULIA *goes half-reluctantly out by the door down R.*

GUIDO: Surely there's more solace in the thought that by now he will be avenged—avenged with all those other victims of evil Borgia ambition.

PANTHASILEA: If I could be sure that Cesare Borgia has paid. . . .

GUIDO: Be sure he has—paid terribly. The snare at Sinigaglia was shrewdly laid. By now he's fast in the jaws of it.

[*She sinks into the chair lately occupied by Guido. He remains standing over her.*

PANTHASILEA: Snares have been set for him before, and always has it been the fowler who's been taken.

GUIDO: Not this time! Not this time. Never were there such fowlers as these—his own captains, leagued with the Orsini, against him. Three days ago he went to Sinigaglia . . . to make his peace with them; and the place an armed camp. O, they'll have made his peace for him.

PANTHASILEA (*fervently*): I hope they have.

GUIDO: Be sure of it. Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois will have been in hell these three days.

PANTHASILEA: And yet . . . (*With sudden anxiety.*) Why is this news delayed? If it was done three days ago . . . ?

GUIDO (*interrupting*): From Sinigaglia here it is at least a three days' ride.

PANTHASILEA: Not with such news as that. It would travel faster than the wind over the face of Italy.

GUIDO: It would travel no faster than the news of failure. And we haven't that—nor shall we have it. Failure is impossible.

PANTHASILEA: You don't think it may be known by now in Assisi . . . ?

GUIDO: The moment it is known there, we shall have Gianluca riding out here to Solignola. The desire to be near you will make him an eager messenger.

PANTHASILEA (*nodding and speaking wistfully*): Poor Gianluca! (*She sighs.*)

GUIDO (*smiling*): So that you begin by pitying him, in time you may come to . . .

PANTHASILEA: Don't, father! Ah, don't!

[*He looks at her, and then shrugs understandingly.*

GUIDO: My dear, I should like to know that you have beside you a man whom I can trust, against the time when I am gone. And since poor Pietro Varano was killed at Pesaro . . .

PANTHASILEA: That is why I cannot bear just now to speak . . . even to think . . . of . . . of this . . .

[*A mutter of voices outside and a clatter of steps on the stair arrest their attention.* PANTHASILEA *rises, her voice is strained.*

PANTHASILEA: News! It will be news . . . at last!

[*The doors open, revealing now the stairhead.* SANTAFIORA *and* ALDI *come quickly in and down. Both are men of middle age:* SANTAFIORA, *the condottiero, burly and vigorous, his body cased in leather, a*

gorget of mail at his throat, a heavy dagger at his girdle, his close-cropped head covered by a cap of purple velvet (as a protection from his helmet now discarded) which fits his skull like his own hair ; ALDI *is frail, delicate and bearded, urbane of manner, soberly patrician in his dress.*

[SANTAFIORA *exclaims breathlessly as he advances.*

SANTAFIORA : My lord ! My lord ! Here is Messer d'Aldi with great tidings.

[GUIDO *and his daughter turn eagerly to face the newcomer.*

GUIDO : Ah ! Be doubly welcome, then, my friend. (*He holds out his hand.*)

[ALDI *takes it, then bows low, hat in hand, to* PANTHASILEA, *who stands tensely waiting.*

ALDI : It is no more than a rumour as yet—a rumour current in the townships of the valley—that Valentino was slain on Monday in Sinigaglia.

GUIDO (*gloomily*) : A rumour ?

SANTAFIORA : Ay—but most oddly circumstantial. Tell him, sir.

ALDI : Why, thus the story runs : On Monday morning Valentino, attended by only a few lances, rode into Sinigaglia to make his peace with the Orsini and with those of his own captains who had been in rebellion against him.

GUIDO : Ay, ay—that is what was concerted.

ALDI : These captains had sent him offers of renewed allegiance and invited him to meet them there. And, he, believing them sincere, delivered himself into their hands.

GUIDO : Yes, yes. And how did it befall ?

ALDI : Of that there are no details yet, beyond the fact that the Duke of Gravina stabbed him with his own hand.

GUIDO (*his voice vibrant, to Panthasilea*) : You hear, Lea ?

ALDI : His head, they say, is on a pike over the gate on the Misa.

PANTHASILEA : Just God, I thank thee !

GUIDO (*drawing a deep breath*) : At last ! At last we are rid of this nightmare ! At last we can breathe again ! And in the Romagna, what is happening ?

ALDI : There are rumours of fighting at Cesena, which is very loyal to him. But I have heard of little else—save that Sforza is back in Pesaro, Caterina's son marching on Imola, and Malatesta hastening to repossess himself of Rimini.

GUIDO (*laughing*) : So that in a little while all will be as it was before this papal scourge was loosed on Italy.

PANTHASILEA (*sadly*) : Nay, not quite all. Pietro Varano will not return to life.

SANTAFIORA : But his brother lives, and will be back in Camerino soon.

PANTHASILEA : What is that to me ?

GUIDO : Something, surely, Lea, when you consider how it comes about. Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois, is dead, and your Pietro avenged with all the others.

SANTAFIORA : Think of it—by the Host ! Valentino at whose name all Italy shuddered—just so much carrion. Ha !

GUIDO : Santafiora, the event demands celebration. There shall be bonfires here on the heights of Solignola, and meat and wine for all. Summon the patricians of the town and . . .

[*A growing mutter of voices off.* GUIDO *interrupts himself.*

GUIDO : What's that ?

A VOICE OF SENESCHAL (*off—above the general mutter*) : Stay while I go to announce you to my lord. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE (GIANLUCA'S): No need. I know my way. . . .

[*Steps clatter up the stairs.*

PANTHASILEA: It is Gianluca.

GUIDO (*gaily*): Aha! Gianluca at last, from Assisi, with the news.

SANTAFIORA (*laughing*): By Heaven, he's behind the fair this time.

[*The doors are flung violently open, and* GIANLUCA DELLA PIEVE *comes in quickly.*

[*He is a young man of not more than twenty-five, slightly built and of an almost effeminate beauty; his personality suggests amiability and sensibility but no strength. He is richly dressed for riding, cloaked and covered with a broad round hat, which, as he enters, he removes from his head, leaving it slung behind him by cords from his shoulders. He is splashed and dusty from head to foot; his face is white, his manner distraught.*

[*He flings forward wildly, striking dismay into those present.*

GIANLUCA: My lord! My lord! Have you heard the news?

GUIDO: That Valentino is dead?

GIANLUCA (*in bitter derision*): Dead? He was never more alive—never more powerful—never more firmly in the ducal saddle!

[*The consternation is general.*

[GUIDO *reels, clutches the back of a chair for support, gasping.*

ALDI: Surely, Ser Gianluca, there is some mistake. . . .

GIANLUCA (*shouting, scornfully*): Mistake?

ALDI: In the townships of the valley the rumour runs that . . .

GIANLUCA: Rumour! What have I to do with rumour? I bring you fact—hideous fact.

SANTAFIORA : But what the devil has happened then ? Didn't he *go* to Sinigaglia ?

GIANLUCA (*grimly*) : Ay—he went.

GUIDO : He went ! But then, the trap ?

GIANLUCA : The trap, sir, caught them that set it—caught them fast by their silly necks. On my soul, I don't know whether to weep or laugh. They took this basilisk for a pigeon. They beguiled him by the sweetness of their whistling, and he came—oh, most obligingly ! a very dove of peace.

GUIDO : But if he came . . .

GIANLUCA : He brought more troops at his heels than they had expected. That gave them pause. They must wait and make their opportunity. Meanwhile to keep suspicion slumbering there was most courteous interchange of loving phrases. And when they would have taken leave of him at the Palace, he insisted that they must in with him, and drink a cup to pledge their happy reconciliation. They went, poor fools. And no sooner were they in, than his gentlemen fell upon them and made them fast.

[GUIDO *sinks limply into his chair.*

SANTAFIORA : All of them ?

GIANLUCA : All but Baglioni, who was fortunately ill, and Petrucci, who was wise. Petrucci stayed away. He's at Siena safe for the present among his own people.

GUIDO : But these others—these who were taken.

GIANLUCA : There were five of them : The Duke of Gravina, Paolo Orsini and his son Fabio, Oliverotto of Fermo, and Vitelli, Tyrant of Castello. Vitelli and Oliverotto are already with their Maker.

SANTAFIORA (*in horror*) : Dead !

GIANLUCA : That very night they were placed back to back, and strangled in the same noose.

GUIDO (*covering his face with his hands*) : O God !

SANTAFIORA: But not even his audacity dared so much with the Orsini.

GIANLUCA: Dared? Pshaw! He dares all things. He merely waits for ends of his own. It is said his messengers are speeding to Rome to arrest Cardinal Orsini and the Archbishop for their complicity.

[*There is a moment's pause of blank astonishment.*

GUIDO: But how did he come to discover the plot?

GIANLUCA: Ah! How? He knows all—all, that terrible man. Sometimes I think he is antichrist or else the fiend himself. He goes into Sinigaglia to meet his doom. He comes out of it more powerful than he went; and now he's advancing by forced marches on Assisi.

[*There is a sudden forward movement on the part of* ALDI *and* SANTAFIORA. GUIDO *bounds from his chair.*

SANTAFIORA: Marching on Assisi, do you say?

GIANLUCA: He is expected to arrive to-morrow.

GUIDO: To-morrow?

SANTAFIORA: Assisi will resist?

GIANLUCA: Assisi will surrender. I attended the Council of the Ancients to-day, summoned to decide this question. Prince Sinibaldi of Venice was there and pleaded eloquently for resistance.

PANTHASILEA: That was no coward's pleading, at least.

GIANLUCA: No. It was the pleading of crafty Venice that would use every state in Italy as the monkey used the cat. But Assisi has not the means to resist even if she had the will.

GUIDO: Has she the will at least?

GIANLUCA: Oh, yes. But . . . (*He shrugs helplessly.*)

GUIDO (*gloomily*): And after Assisi it will be the turn of Solignola.

PANTHASILEA: Solignola does not yield.

GUIDO : By Heaven's Light, no ! Here we have both the will and the means to resist. We must take order at once. There is not an hour to lose. Come, Santafiora. See the Council summoned. You, Messer Francesco, seek Campo and Barbero. Then bring them here to deliberate with us.

ALDI (*with a heavy sigh, and a bow*) : I go at once, my lord. (*Bowing to Panthasilea.*) Madonna.

[*He goes up.*

GUIDO (*in the act of following*) : Await me here, Gianluca ; unless you're in haste to return.

GIANLUCA : Return ? I care little if I never see Assisi again.

[GUIDO *nods, and goes up. He pauses, and looks at Panthasilea, sitting listless and dejected in the chair at back.*

GUIDO (*tenderly*) : Courage, Lea.

PANTHASILEA : I need courage, Heaven knows.

[*He stoops to kiss her. Then he goes out, followed by* SANTAFIORA. *They close the doors.*

[*There is a loud hum of voices from without, greeting Guido as he descends the stairs. This gradually recedes and presently dies down.*

[PANTHASILEA *rises and moves up to the loggia, whence she looks out.* GIANLUCA *hovers near, obviously uncomfortable, hesitating to intrude upon her mood. She takes no heed of him.*

[A SERVANT *enters R. with a salver bearing a gold beaker and some Venetian glasses. He sets it down upon the table, and withdraws.*

GIANLUCA : You have no word for me to-day, madonna. Alas ! A messenger is welcomed according to the news he brings, and Heaven knows I am a messenger of evil.

PANTHASILEA : Heaven knows you are.

GIANLUCA: You say it almost as if I were the author of my news.

[*Rousing herself, she realizes her ungraciousness and turns.*

PANTHASILEA: No, no, Gianluca. Ah, forgive me. You know . . . you know how I have hoped and prayed that the Sinigaglia enterprise might rid Italy of this evil monster. And now . . . This!

GIANLUCA: You had not prayed for it more fervently than I.

PANTHASILEA: Had I not? I wonder! Let me pour for you, Gianluca. You will need a cup after your ride. (*She pours.*) It will revive you.

GIANLUCA (*softly*): It needs no wine to revive me when I ride to Solignola, not though I rode all the way from Rome. To have the happiness to see you, Lea . . .

PANTHASILEA (*almost sternly*): Not now, Gianluca! Not now!

GIANLUCA: Why not now?

PANTHASILEA: Do you ask "why"?

GIANLUCA: Lea, you have bewitched me, I think. Though the earth quake under the tramp of Valentino's host, though all Italy come clattering down in ruin about me, my mind cannot be shaken from its thought of you—always you.

PANTHASILEA (*more gently*): Don't, Gianluca. Ah, don't! Be content to be my friend.

GIANLUCA: Surely your friend, since the greater must include the less.

PANTHASILEA: My friend, and nothing more just now. How can you woo me in the very midst of war, with death all about us as it is?

GIANLUCA: Love is greater than death, Lea. Love is Lord of Life.

PANTHASILEA: You know that I was to have married Pietro Varano.

GIANLUCA (*sadly*): Ay.

PANTHASILEA: And that he is dead—murdered?

GIANLUCA: Heaven rest his soul!

PANTHASILEA: Then . . . surely you understand. Surely you see the wound I bear, unhealed and raw.

GIANLUCA: It but serves to move my love more violently. I ask nothing yet. I am patient. I can wait. But though you should never come to love me, Lea, you cannot deny my loving you, nor while I've life and breath can I cease from proclaiming it to you.

PANTHASILEA (*slowly considering him, she smiles wistfully*): Dear Gianluca, how you deceive yourself!

GIANLUCA: Deceive myself?

[VOICES *off, and steps upon the stair.*

PANTHASILEA: The members of the Council. You have not drunk your wine.

[*He looks at her, and drinks. The doors are thrown open, and* ALDI *comes in, followed by* DEL CAMPO, PAVIANO *and* ANOTHER GENTLEMAN OF THE COUNCIL.

CAMPO (*coming forward*): This is terrible news, madonna!

PAVIANO: I suppose there is no possibility of error, Ser Gianluca?

GIANLUCA: None. The Communal Palace in Assisi is being made ready to receive the Duke. It is expected that he will make Assisi his headquarters for the present.

CAMPO: Conducting thence his operations against Solignola?

GIANLUCA: Should it refuse to yield.

PANTHASILEA: Be sure that Solignola will refuse to yield.

CAMPO (*tartly*): That is what the Council is to decide, madonna.

PANTHASILEA : Decide ? Can there be a doubt, Messer del Campo.

CAMPO : If we must go the way of Pesaro, Imola, Rimini, Faenza and all the others, at least let us do so in the manner that will involve less cost to our people.

PANTHASILEA : Cost, sir ? Are we traders, to count the cost ? Here, honour is at stake, and honour is not a marketable thing.

[GUIDO *enters at back with* SANTAFIORA *and* ANOTHER COUNCILLOR.

CAMPO : Assisi, madonna, has taken another view.

PANTHASILEA (*violently*) : Solignola is not Assisi, Messer del Campo. Assisi lies open to attack, and is without natural defences. Solignola is the most inaccessible stronghold in Middle Italy.

GUIDO : Perched here on these craggy heights, it can defy greater legions than those of Valentino. But to table, sirs. We are all assembled.

[SANTAFIORA *bars the door. Then he comes down to the table about which the others are already grouped, some standing, some sitting.*

GIANLUCA : My lord, I will withdraw until your deliberations are . . .

GUIDO : No, no. (*Standing at the table-head R. he addresses the Council.*) Messer Gianluca is fully informed of what is happening, and his presence may be useful.

ALDI : Also he makes common cause with us.

[*General murmur of assent.*

GUIDO (*to Gianluca*) : So that we shall be grateful if you will remain awhile.

GIANLUCA (*bowing*) : To command !

[*He goes up and takes his stand by Panthasilea, who is leaning against the high chair at back. On his approach she sits. The others also now seat themselves.* ALDI *and* CAMPO *on the upper side of the table, so as to*

face the audience with one of the other councillors: PAVIANO *and the remaining councillor on the lower side, having their backs to the audience.* SANTAFIORA *takes the table's foot, on L. facing Guido.*

[GUIDO *sits last, speaking as he does so.*

GUIDO: Our deliberations need not keep us long. You are already aware of the terrible menace that hangs over us.

[*He is interrupted by a knock upon the doors.* SANTAFIORA *rises.*

GUIDO: What now? See who comes.

[GIANLUCA *lifts the bar and opens the doors. An elderly Seneschal appears, bearing a letter.* GUIDO *bawls impatiently:*

GUIDO: What is it?

SENESCHAL (*hastening down to him*): My lord! (*He proffers the letter.*) This is brought by a friar. He pleads the utmost urgency, else I should not have dared disturb you.

[GUIDO *takes the letter, breaks the seal, unfolds and hurriedly reads. An exclamation escapes him.*

GUIDO: Prin . . . (*He seems about to make an announcement to the Council, then checks, and turns to the Seneschal.*) Bring him up.

[*The* SENESCHAL *bows and goes out.* GUIDO *watches him off, then speaks.*

GUIDO: Sirs, in this note Prince Sinibaldi announces himself. He has ridden over secretly from Assisi. He is more prudent than you, Gianluca, who have had the hardihood to come here openly.

CAMPO: Sinibaldi, do you say? Who is he?

PAVIA: Ay, who?

GUIDO: Tell them, Gianluca. You have his acquaintance.

GIANLUCA: Prince Sinibaldi is the envoy-extraordinary sent by Venice to felicitate the Duke of Valentinois upon his conquest of Sinigaglia. He arrived in Assisi last night.

ALDI (*incredulously*): Venice sends felicitations to Valentino? Venice?

CAMPO: You're surely wrong, Messer Gianluca. Venice notoriously is the power in all Italy most hostile to the House of Borgia.

GIANLUCA (*sneering*): That may explain Prince Sinibaldi's presence here.

CAMPO: I don't understand.

GUIDO (*impatiently*): Isn't it plain? Though Venice fears his power and desires his ruin, yet she is not at war with him; therefore she must observe the amenities of peace.

SANTAFIORA: That's what they call politics, I suppose. Thank God, I'm a soldier.

[*The* SENESCHAL *re-enters, accompanied by a tall man, in the grey habit of a Capuchin friar, his face invisible in the cowl.*

SENESCHAL: My lord, here is the messenger.

[GUIDO *rises. The newcomer bows.*

GUIDO (*to Seneschal*): You may go.

[*The* SENESCHAL *goes out again, and closes the doors, which* GIANLUCA *presently bars.*

[*Then at last* GUIDO *returns the bow.*

GUIDO: Excellency, be welcome. We are private here. These are the members of my council. Messer Gianluca, you already know.

[*The* FRIAR *looks round, questioningly.*

GUIDO: That is my daughter, excellency—my heiress here in Solignola.

[SINIBALDI *draws back the cowl, and loosens his girdle, revealing his rich black dress.*

SINIBALDI : Sirs, your servant ; madonna, to command.

[*He tosses the habit aside. He is booted, and armed with a dagger. He bows to the company.*

SINIBALDI : You all realize, I am sure, that in certain circumstances, if my presence here to-day were to become known, the adventure might cost me my life—which is a small thing—and the Most Serene Republic might be compromised—which would be a grave one. Hence my precautions.

[*He comes down.*

GUIDO : Be sure that what passes here does not go beyond those doors. A chair, excellency.

[GUIDO *advances the chair by the hearth, then swings his own seat half round, so that he shall not have his back to the prince.* SINIBALDI *acknowledges the chair, and standing beside it looks up at Gianluca with a half-smile.*

SINIBALDI : Although I have made haste, it seems that another is here before me with the news of what is happening in Assisi.

GUIDO : Ay, bad news travels quickly. That is why you find the Council here assembled.

SINIBALDI (*anxiously*) : To determine whether you will follow the example of weak-kneed Assisi ?

GUIDO : No. To determine the precise measures for our resistance of this bastard duke.

CAMPO (*agitated*) : What ? Is resistance, then, already determined ?

[*There is an ominous pause, all eyes upon* DEL CAMPO, GUIDO *scowling,* SINIBALDI *cunningly alert.*

GUIDO : Is there anyone here so base as to urge surrender ?

CAMPO : But we have not yet been summoned to surrender ?

SINIBALDI : That summons, sir, believe me, will not be long delayed.

CAMPO : Were it not best to wait. . . ?

SANTAFIORA : To be sure we'll wait. But while we wait, we'll arm.

CAMPO : My lord, in making up your mind to resistance, have you considered what will happen to the townships of the valley ?

GUIDO : I have not.

PAVIANO : It should be weighed, I think.

CAMPO : Of course it should. It is our duty to weigh it. We are here in Solignola itself, which is almost impregnable. But those in the valley are defenceless, and Valentino may terribly avenge upon them the stubbornness of the capital.

SINIBALDI : Surely, sir, if you think that, you cannot have observed Valentino's methods. They are not quite so crude. It is not his way to avenge upon dependencies the resistance of a capital. He is too guileful, believe me. Whom he subjects, he conciliates.

GIANLUCA : Always is it so. Consider the case of Faenza. What harm was suffered by the folk in her territories ? None. The townships surrendered, and knew no violence, though Faenza herself resisted stubbornly.

CAMPO : But to little purpose.

GUIDO : That is beside the point. And Faenza had not the natural strength of Solignola.

CAMPO : Yet in the end surrender we must. We cannot resist an army of ten thousand men for ever.

SANTAFIORA (*sharply*) : They cannot besiege us for ever.

ALDI (*to Sinibaldi*) : If we hold out, excellency, may we look to Venice for assistance ultimately ?

SINIBALDI : I would that I could promise you that. But . . . (*He sighs.*)

GUIDO : Yet it is in the interest of Venice that we resist.

SINIBALDI : That is why I am here to-night. Ostensibly I am the Republic's ambassador to the Duke. In reality I am her ambassador to those in Romagna valiant enough to stand against this Catalan adventurer. The interests of the Serene Republic are the interests of every fief in Middle Italy.

PANTHASILEA : Then why does not the Serene Republic come in arms to our assistance ?

[*Cries of assent.*

SINIBALDI : She would do so gladly, madonna. Unfortunately her hands are tied by her treaty with Valentino.

GUIDO : I never knew a treaty bind a State one moment longer than convenient.

SINIBALDI : The republic would have to reckon with France—for the King of France is behind Valentino. You perceive the danger, sirs. In the end . . . Venice may be compelled to incur it.

GIANLUCA : Does not the Serene Republic consider that the end has been reached ?

[GIANLUCA's *voice is cold, almost hostile. Hostility towards Sinibaldi marks his bearing throughout, for he sees in the Venetian a crafty, cold-blooded schemer, who is slyly urging others at their own expense to pull* (*as he presently says*) *the chestnuts from the fire for Venice.*

SINIBALDI : No.

ALDI : What remains ?

PAVIANO : Ay, what ?

SINIBALDI : You know—you all know by now—what had been planned in Sinigaglia. It failed. But that which failed in Sinigaglia might succeed in Assisi.

[*There is a general movement of awed surprise.*

SINIBALDI : Need more be said ?

SANTAFIORA : Ay—the how and the when, the way and the means.

SINIBALDI: That, of course. But first . . . (*To Guido.*) Have you a mind to it? To rid Italy of this scourge at a single stroke? To save your dominions from being ravished by this insatiable devil?

GUIDO (*assentingly*): By Heaven's light!

SINIBALDI: Then to it. Destroy Cesare Borgia, and you destroy the head and brain of the Pontifical forces. You make an end of this conquest of the Romagna which will presently spread to a conquest of Middle Italy; for if he lives he will not rest until he is King of Tuscany.

CAMPO (*rising in horror*): It is murder that you are proposing! Murder!

SINIBALDI (*rising also*): What, then? Shall a mere word make a barrier for grown men?

[*There is a moment's silence.*

PANTHASILEA: It would not for one woman that I know of.

[*They turn to stare at her. She rises slowly.*

PANTHASILEA: What his excellency says is true. While that monster lives there is no peace for Middle Italy. And there is one thing, and one thing only that can save Solignola—the death of Valentino.

[*Some acclamations.*

SINIBALDI: And there you have the simple truth. While he is resting at Assisi should be your opportunity, if you have the will and the courage to seize it.

GIANLUCA (*ironical*): You mean the will and the courage that Venice lacks?

SINIBALDI (*offended*): Sir!

PANTHASILEA: }
GUIDO: } Gianluca!

[GIANLUCA *comes forward impetuously.*

GIANLUCA: You have said, sir, that the interests of Venice and the interests of the Romagna fiefs are one in

this. Why then, sir, do you not strike on behalf of Venice, and so, have done ?

[*Murmurs of assent.*

SINIBALDI (*stiffly*) : Because, sir, I am not so authorized by the Most Serene.

GIANLUCA : Yet you are authorized, it seems, to come here urging us to do it. What is the difference ?

SINIBALDI : It is considerable. First, the discovery of Venice's hand in this would embroil her with the King of France, in which case hope would be at an end for all. Second, your need is urgent, far more urgent than the need of Venice. Venice is not directly menaced. Venice can wait. Can you ?

GUIDO :
ALDI : (*speaking together*) No, no . . . By Heaven we can't.
SANTAFIORA : He's at our gates.

GUIDO : Your excellency is in the right. Confess it, Gianluca.

GIANLUCA : Did your excellency urge this course upon the Assisians ?

SINIBALDI : You know that I did not.

GIANLUCA : Why not ?

SINIBALDI : Because when I reached Assisi I found her ready as a harlot for surrender. There was no will to resist. And so . . . (*he shrugs*) . . . I came to you.

GUIDO : And here you are welcome, sir—you and your proposal.

CAMPO : What ? Do you say, my lord, that this plan of murder has your countenance ?

GUIDO : What else remains ? Pshaw ! We have but to discover how best the thing can be accomplished.

[CAMPO *rises with great dignity.*

CAMPO : In that case, my lord, suffer me to withdraw

before you go further in a matter in which I can have no part.

[*He bows to the company, and in the general silence, stared at by all, he goes up and out. As the door closes, Sinibaldi starts up in agitation.*

SINIBALDI : Lord Count ! That man must not leave the citadel.

GUIDO (*frowning*) : Eh ?

SINIBALDI : The life of every man present may hang upon it. If del Campo should utter a word, a hint—the Duke may hear of it to-morrow. Should my presence here become known, it will be enough.

SANTAFIORA (*heaving himself up*) : Body of Bacchus, it is so ! Valentino's spies are everywhere. They may be in Solignola now.

GUIDO (*taken aback*) : What then ?

SANTAFIORA : There is no dungeon in Solignola too deep for Messer del Campo until this thing is ended.

SINIBALDI (*quietly sinister*) : There is none deep enough.

[*The whole council is awe-stricken.* GUIDO *hesitates a moment, struggling obviously with his reluctance. Then he speaks hoarsely to Santafiora.*

GUIDO : See it done.

PANTHASILEA (*appalled*) : No, no, Santafiora. Wait ! Father, he has been our friend, and you . . .

GUIDO : Were he my own brother, I must think of Solignola first.

[*He waves imperiously to Santafiora, who goes out at once.* PANTHASILEA *sinks back into her chair, wide-eyed, distressed, but persuaded of the necessity.*

GUIDO (*flinging himself down again in his chair*) : And now, sirs, to business.

ALDI : A doubt occurs to me touching the wisdom of Prince Sinibaldi's proposal as it stands.

[*Angry clamour.*

ALDI : Give me your patience, sirs. I do not wish to bear Messer del Campo company in—his dungeon.

GUIDO : Speak out, Messer Francesco. We all know your worth.

ALDI : His excellency has told us what would be the ultimate consequences of slaying Cesare Borgia. But we here in Solignola have also to consider the immediate consequences ; for these would touch ourselves.

SINIBALDI : Sacrifice for the State's weal is the sacred duty of the individual.

GIANLUCA : It is easy for the Prince, sheltered in the inviolability of an ambassador's office, to utter these exalted sentiments.

[*Some laughter.*

SINIBALDI : By Heavens, sir . . .

ALDI : Myself, I deplore the sacrifice of the individual if it can be avoided.

GUIDO : But can it ?

ALDI : Consider now : His captains would never allow the death of Valentino to go unavenged. And the measure of their probable revenge is such as no man may calmly contemplate.

GIANLUCA : Messer Francesco d'Aldi is right. Those devils would carry fire and sword through every township and every hamlet of the State. No man, woman or child would they spare in their devastating rage. Have you thought of that, Prince Sinibaldi, that you come urging Count Guido to pull this chestnut out of the fire for Venice ?

SINIBALDI : Heaven give me patience with you, sir ! It is not for Venice only. You forget that unless Count Guido takes action, and that quickly, he is lost.

GIANLUCA : But no less lost if he takes such action as you advise—whether it succeed or fail.

SINIBALDI : What right have you to assume that the hand to strike the blow must of necessity be discovered ?

GIANLUCA: The right by which you assumed it, when you urged it as a reason why Venice should not strike.

SINIBALDI: Sir, almost you force me to believe that you seek deliberately to provoke me.

GUIDO: Nay, nay. My interest is his only spur.

ALDI (*patiently*): If you would but hear me out, sirs, a deal of unprofitable heat might be avoided. If I show you the weakness, I am also prepared to show you the remedy.

[*They turn to him eagerly, the dispute forgotten.*

ALDI: Your talk is all of killing Valentino. I have shown you the danger of that. My proposal is that we take him alive.

ALL: Alive!

GUIDO: Why? What then?

ALDI: Hold him as a hostage. Meanwhile, send envoys to the Pope. Offer His Holiness his son's life and liberty in exchange for our own—in exchange for a Bull of perpetual enfranchisement from the States of the Church.

SINIBALDI: Most shrewd!

ALDI: And to quicken the Holy Father's penmanship, we add that if the Bull is not in our hands within a given term we shall proceed to hang the Duke.

GUIDO: That's it, Messer Francesco! You've shown us the way.

[*General approval.*

ALDI: But there's a difficulty.

[*General pause.*

It lies in the Duke's capture.

PAVIANO (*gloomily*): Ay! To kill him is a child's task by comparison.

The door opens. SANTAFIORA *comes in. There is silence.* GUIDO *looks questioningly at the Condottiero.* SANTAFIORA *nods significantly. The others draw breath*

audibly. SANTAFIORA *stolidly comes down and resumes his place at the table.*

GUIDO: A shrewd suggestion, yours, Messer d'Aldi. Surely by guile it should be possible to lure him into some trap.

GIANLUCA: It would ask a guile not less than his own.

GUIDO (*ruminating*): Trap, eh? Trap? A trap needs baiting. What bait do you advise? (*He looks round, and is met by blankness.*) Come now: What is the bait to lure a man?

ALDI: Ordinarily I know none better than a woman. But . . .

SEVERAL: A woman! That's it!

ALDI (*to Sinibaldi*): Do women tempt this duke?

GUIDO: Need you ask? He'll be his father's son.

SINIBALDI: Hardly as lusty in that respect. Still, he's far from proof against the lure of beauty.

GUIDO: How should he be? He's a man and young. It should be easy for a woman so to enmesh him in her toils that he would lie helpless.

SINIBALDI: Of course it should. You have solved it, Lord Count.

GUIDO: In theory, yes. But in practice—— Where shall you find this woman?

[*A pause.*

SINIBALDI: Are lovely women so scarce in Romagna?

GUIDO: Women, no. But for this—no drab of the town will serve your turn. She must have beauty to attract, wit to enslave, accomplishments to deceive, and courage to perform her part. Again I ask you, sirs: Where shall you find that woman?

[*Again there is a pause. Then in the background* PANTHASILEA *slowly rises. Her voice beats suddenly and sharply upon the silence.*

PANTHASILEA: Here.

[*All turn.* GIANLUCA *recoils in horror.* GUIDO *starts up from his seat, aghast.* SINIBALDI'S *eyes gleam with satisfaction.*

GUIDO (*in dismay*): You, Lea! Are you mad?

GIANLUCA: My God! Never! Never!

[PANTHASILEA *comes slowly down to the table.*

PANTHASILEA: Is it not fitting that Solignola's future ruler should be Solignola's saviour in her hour of need? There is no other who has my claim to this.

GUIDO: But it is monstrous! Unthinkable! What could you do?

PANTHASILEA: What no man of you all could do, and what no subject woman should or could be asked to do.

GIANLUCA: The very thought of it is horrible. Lea! Think what it means!

PANTHASILEA (*calmly*): I know. Sirs, if the saving of Solignola were not in itself enough, there is more than that between this infamous duke and me. Pietro Varano and I were to have been wed this spring. And Pietro Varano was strangled three months ago in Pesaro by Borgia justice. Justice!

GUIDO (*distraught*): But the danger of it!

PANTHASILEA: Could you in honour ask another woman to face the dangers to which you would not expose your daughter? Besides, where is this danger? I am not known in Assisi. I have never been there. I am scarcely known even here in Solignola, where I have been seldom seen since I came back from Mantua.

[*General murmurings of dissent.*

GUIDO: But, Lea . . .

PANTHASILEA: Sirs, you must not oppose me. Let me go down into Assisi with a dozen men of Santafiora's condotta disguised as grooms and lackeys. And while

Solignola defies Valentino, and so detains him in Assisi, I shall find a way to ensnare him, and carry him off to Siena, where Petrucci will gladly act as your agent in this matter.

ALDI: Petrucci!

SINIBALDI: That's a shrewd thought!

PANTHASILEA: For my purpose, Gianluca, I shall require your house in Assisi. You'll lend it to me.

GIANLUCA (*passionately*): Lend it to you! My house? To be a . . . a . . . trap in which you—your matchless womanhood—shall be the lure? I'll be for ever damned before I am a party to such infamy.

PANTHASILEA (*quietly*): Solignola is in danger. In the valley thousands of women and little children are threatened with violence, homelessness, hunger, death, and worse than death.

[GUIDO *groans, taking his head in his hands.*

PANTHASILEA: Shall one woman hesitate? Shall one woman fear a little insult, when at the price of it, she can buy so much? An infamy, says Messer Gianluca della Pieve. (*Passionately.*) The infamy for me were to sit safe and idle here.

[GUIDO *looks up. His face is that of a stricken man. He braces himself. His voice is harsh.*

GUIDO: She is right. It is her sacred duty to the people she will one day rule. Since there offers no way by which a man's strength can prevail against this evil tyrant—why, Gianluca, you will lend your house; you, Santafiora, shall go with her and take the men she needs.

[GIANLUCA *stands speechless, anguished.*

[SANTAFIORA *grunts stolidly.*

[*The* OTHERS *look on silently, a little appalled.*

[SINIBALDI *covertly smiles his cynical satisfaction, whilst* PANTHASILEA *confronts them, tense but calm.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE I

An Antechamber in the Communal Palace at Assisi.

A spacious room panelled in dark oak with a tesselated floor on which lemon verbena and similar herbs are scattered. At back four steps lead up to a narrow gallery running thence right and left under an arched roof carried on slender corkscrew pillars of polished wood, very decoratively carved in the capitals, these pillars springing from panelling which is carried up here to a height of some five feet. Immediately facing the steps, beyond the gallery, another step leads up to a door which is closed, and guarded at curtain-rise by a Swiss man-at-arms. He wears striped hose, red and white, puffed out and slashed at the knee. Above this, cuissarts of steel, steel back-and-breast, and brassards. The back-and-breast is covered by a tabard on which the arms of the House of Borgia are displayed in full (this constituting the livery). His hat is slashed, red and white, and heavily plumed with red and white feathers. He is armed with a broad-headed pike. A strip of richly coloured Eastern carpet runs from this door across the gallery and down the four steps to the level of the antechamber.

There is a single door high up in the left flat. The main doors—double—are low down in right flat.

A long, high, mullioned window, set at a very wide angle across, joins the right extremity of the gallery with the right flat. This window is in three sections between two mullions; it is Gothic in design and in the arcs above there is stained glass bearing the arms of Assisi. The sunlight shining through these throws patches of vivid colour on the floor and walls. Below the arcs the windows are of clear glass; the middle one stands open. The only furniture in the room consists of a table, covered with an Eastern carpet and bearing writing materials. This is set rather low down, and to left of

midstage. There are two chairs at this table. Lower down and further to the left, there is a wooden settle, equipped with a leather cushion, raked sharply across. Benches are set against the gallery right and left of steps, and another bench against the right flat, between double doors and window. There is also a cushioned window-seat. A portrait of St. Francis adorns the left flat.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN *the antechamber is occupied by three main groups. One of these about the window, some seated and some standing, consists of two ladies and one gentleman, with whom is* CARDINAL REMOLINO. *Another is that of Valentino's three Captains,* DIEGO RAMIREZ, SCIPIONE *and* FERRANTE, *which occupies the middle of the stage; their dress and arms advertise their calling. (N.B.: They are the only men present with weapons upon them.)*

The third and last group is composed of the Ambassadors, MACCHIAVELLI, CAPELLO, GASPARO, *and* MARIANO, *and is ranged about the table.*

MACCHIAVELLI *is a slight, lean man of thirty-three, with a pale, shaven crafty face, prominent cheek-bones, and wide-set, lively eyes. His black hair is fairly short, and squarely cut. He is dressed in rather rusty black with almost clerical simplicity, and his long black gown is of distinctly clerical fashion over a plain black doublet, buttoned to the throat. By contrast, his fellow-ambassadors look opulent in their furred velvet gowns, especially the smooth, corpulent and elderly* CAPELLO.

Two cowled monks sit telling their beads on the bench under the gallery right: the bench left is occupied by two stripling pages who are playing Mora. They are dressed in tight-fitting scarlet with the Borgia escutcheon wrought on the breasts of their doublets.

The chatter is general, and enlivened by trills of laughter from the ladies, for which the CARDINAL *appears chiefly responsible.*

The main doors are thrust open by a man-at-arms (A Swiss, counterpart of the one above) who, entering, stands at attention, with ordered pike, whilst Prince Sinibaldi swaggers in, resplendently dressed, and followed by a page, carrying his sword and purse.

[*The* SWISS *levels his pike to bar the boy's passage.*

SWISS : Hi ! Young sir ! That sword !

SINIBALDI (*checking and turning*) : What now ?

[*The general chatter dies down.*

SWISS : No one, not of the duke's service, passes this door wearing a sword.

SINIBALDI : He's not wearing a sword. He is carrying one—for me.

SWISS : It's all one, excellency. The sword does not enter.

SINIBALDI : Are we at the Vatican ? Is this a Papal antechamber ? I am an ambassador and I have my privileges.

[CAPELLO *detaches from the group of ambassadors, and comes down to* SINIBALDI.

SWISS : No privilege to bear arms in here. My orders, excellency.

[CAPELLO *presses* SINIBALDI'S *arm, grimacing significantly.* SINIBALDI *shrugs his impatience.*

SINIBALDI : Go wait in the outer room, boy.

[*The* PAGE *retires with the* SWISS, *who closes the doors again, from the outside.*

[SINIBALDI *turns to* CAPELLO, *who is soothing his ruffled humour.*

SINIBALDI : What new rule is this, Messer Capello ?

CAPELLO (*sneering*) : The duke perceives the need to take precautions against the sort of affection he inspires. It is very prudent of him. He is not without bitter enemies here in Assisi.

SINIBALDI : And elsewhere.

CAPELLO (*hypocritically*) : Alas !

[*He glances significantly at* SINIBALDI, *who pulls himself together, and looks round. He exchanges bows with the Cardinal, and then, on* CAPELLO'S *arm, joins the ambassadorial group.*

SINIBALDI : Ah, Messer Macchiavelli ! Do you still linger here in Assisi ?

MACCHIAVELLI (*slyly*) : My presence calls for no explanation. My motives are innocent. I am detained here by affairs.

SINIBALDI (*a little dubious of Macchiavelli's meaning*) : So are we all, sir. You are not singular in that. And what news from Florence ? How does the Signory view the affair at Sinigaglia ?

MACCHIAVELLI : How would your excellency have my masters view it ? Why, with hearty approval—(*sardonic*) like the Serene Republic.

SINIBALDI : I am glad that our respective States take the same view. Harmony, I always think, is the soul of statecraft. Don't you ?

MACCHIAVELLI (*uncompromisingly*) : No.

SINIBALDI : No ?

MACCHIAVELLI : When there is harmony, there is no need for statecraft.

CAPELLO : Oh, but to preserve it—to keep the peace ?

MACCHIAVELLI : Force is what keeps the peace. Statecraft disturbs it.

SINIBALDI : Surely, Messer Macchiavelli, in an ambassador and the ambassador of such a power as Florence, this is rank heresy ?

MACCHIAVELLI : Most wisdom, my lord, is heresy. But the strong hand, well displayed, seldom needs exerting. Si vis pacem, para bellum. That is a truth Duke Valentino understands.

SINIBALDI (*laughing*): Is it? The events hardly encourage him. The strong hand has been well displayed before Solignola to little purpose; and it's been exerting itself, too, for a week, without result.

CAPELLO: Ay! How do you reconcile that with your theory, sir?

MACCHIAVELLI: I don't.

SINIBALDI: But then . . . ?

MACCHIAVELLI: I look beyond for a reason.

[*There is a pause.* SINIBALDI *and* CAPELLO *are a little uneasy.*

SINIBALDI (*sardonic*): Oh? And you see?

MACCHIAVELLI: Nothing. Therefore, I am the more suspicious.

CAPELLO (*breathlessly*): And you suspect?

MACCHIAVELLI: That Solignola is being stimulated into resistance by one of the great powers of Italy.

SINIBALDI (*taken aback, then counterfeiting amusement*): But how very interesting! And your evidence?

MACCHIAVELLI: Evidence? I leave evidence to dullards, lord prince. I have my wits.

CAPELLO: They are renowned. (*Bowing.*) The Signory of Florence is most fortunate in her Secretary of State.

MACCHIAVELLI: Scarcely so fortunate as the Serene Republic of Venice in her ambassadors—ordinary (*bowing to* CAPELLO) and extraordinary (*to* SINIBALDI).

SINIBALDI *and* CAPELLO (*speaking together*): O, sir!

SINIBALDI: But from whom should Solignola expect assistance, Messer Macchiavelli?

MACCHIAVELLI: Ah, that . . .! I can tell you from whom she does not expect it. Nothing more.

SINIBALDI: And the duke? Does he share your views? He honours you with a deal of his confidence.

MACCHIAVELLI : The duke, lord prince, honours no man with his confidence. He allows some odd fools to think so. That is all.

[*There is laughter in the ambassadorial group.* SINIBALDI *turns away.*

SINIBALDI : What keeps his magnificence this morning ? He is not usually so late in giving audience.

[*The* CAPTAINS *drawn by the laughter have moved up to join the Ambassadors.* RAMIREZ *answers him.*

RAMIREZ : A courier has just arrived from Cesena. I would to Heaven he had broken his neck on the way, or else arrived sooner. He keeps us cooling our heels here, when our work is under the walls of Solignola.

[RAMIREZ *is a vigorous man of thirty, swarthy, and bearded in the Spanish fashion, truculent of air and carriage, fully conscious of the fact that he is a great soldier.*

SINIBALDI : And how does the work advance, Don Diego ?

RAMIREZ : It doesn't advance at all, devil take it ! I have conducted fifteen sieges in my time, and brought them all to a capitulation. But this one. . . .

SCIPIONE : We've wasted a whole week there to no purpose at all.

[SCIPIONE, *a tall, fair man of about* RAMIREZ' *age, self-confident and downright, but without any of truculent swagger that distinguishes his brother captain.*

RAMIREZ : Curses on the fool that perched a town on a spot that's only fit for goats.

[*The door at back opens. There is a general stir of expectancy. A* CHAMBERLAIN *in a surcoat, chain of office on his breast, a wand in his hand, emerges and comes to the head of the steps. He is accompanied by a* COURIER *who comes down, and goes out R.*

CHAMBERLAIN : Don Diego Ramirez !

RAMIREZ : Here ! (*Swaggering forward.*)

CHAMBERLAIN : His highness desires you to confer at once with Captain da Corella, who has commands for you.

RAMIREZ (*self-sufficiently*) : It is important that I see his highness, himself.

CHAMBERLAIN : Later, perhaps. Not now. Those are his orders.

[*He turns to the pages.*

CHAMBERLAIN : Here, Giacopo ! Conduct the Captain to Messer da Corella.

RAMIREZ (*with a shrug*) : Ouf ! (*To* SCIPIONE *and* FERRANTE.) Come along, you others. Let us go and see what Micheletto has to say.

PAGE : This way, your worthiness.

[*He opens and holds the door up L.* RAMIREZ *and the other* TWO CAPTAINS *stride out. The* PAGE *follows, closing the door.*

CHAMBERLAIN : Cardinal Remolino, his highness will see you at once.

CARDINAL : I come. You give me leave, ladies . . . and you, sirs.

[*There is an exchange of courtesies.*

CHAMBERLAIN (*addressing the antechamber generally*) : His highness will be occupied for some time yet. It is pleasanter on the loggia here at the gallery's end. (*He indicates it, Off R.*)

[*The* COURTIERS (*i.e., ladies and gallants*) *rise and begin to move up in the wake of the Cardinal, but some distance behind him. As the latter passes up the steps he beckons the* MONKS, *who rise and follow him. They pass through the door at the back. The* CHAMBERLAIN *is about to retire when* SINIBALDI *detains him.*

SINIBALDI : Will you say to his highness that I am here to pay my homage ?

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *bows, and withdraws through the door at back, which he closes.*

[*The* COURTIERS *now move up the steps, along the gallery to the right, and so pass out of view, laughing and chatting. As the last of them are disappearing, the main doors are opened, and the* SWISS *enters, ushering* PANTHASILEA *and* GIULIA. *The* SWISS *on guard above now shoulders his pike, and begins to pace the gallery's length, disappearing from view for a moment or two each time that he reaches either of the visible ends of it.*

SWISS : In here, madonna. His highness will be giving audience soon.

[SINIBALDI *sees her, and at once leaves the ambassadorial group, which by now has moved over to the window, where the other three remain closely in talk, their backs to the stage.*

SINIBALDI : My homage, madonna.

PANTHASILEA : Lord prince.

[*He bows, then glances furtively at the group in the window. Seeing its members engrossed, he draws closer to her, and lowers his voice.*

SINIBALDI : Is this prudent ? That you should thrust yourself in here ?

PANTHASILEA (*smiling and calm*) : It is necessary to make a beginning. I have waited a week, plaguing my wits to find a way.

SINIBALDI : But to come—into the lion's den. It is very rash.

PANTHASILEA : Not more than the rest of the enterprise. I seek audience of the duke, such as is accorded to all who seek it. Moreover, I have a definite reason. I come to ask for justice.

SINIBALDI : On what grounds ?

PANTHASILEA : The best that my invention could discover. I have no fear—save as concerns Gianluca. He is hostile—madly hostile—to the whole business.

SINIBALDI : I thought you had persuaded him. . . .

PANTHASILEA : So did I. But he's recanted. He won't be persuaded. He raves and rants, and swears that at need he will kill the duke with his own hands rather than let me carry through my project.

SINIBALDI (*alarmed*) : Then if he knows that you have come here . . .

PANTHASILEA : He doesn't. I have eluded him. Once he knows that I am definitely committed, he will perforce submit. But you, sir ? Is it wise of you to stand in talk with me so long ?

SINIBALDI : I know you as Madonna Bianca Bracci of Spoleto. I have made your acquaintance since coming here to Assisi. Why should it be unwise of me to talk to you ?

PANTHASILEA : You misunderstand. It might be unwise of Monna Bianca Bracci of Spoleto to be seen talking to the envoy-extraordinary of Venice. The Serene Republic is in none such good odour hereabouts.

SINIBALDI (*bowing, with an ironic smile*) : I see. In that case . . .

[*The door at back has opened again, and the* CHAMBERLAIN *reappears.*

CHAMBERLAIN : Prince Sinibaldi !

[SINIBALDI *starts round.*

CHAMBERLAIN : His highness is distressed that you should wait. But affairs detain him still. If your business is urgent, he informs you and (*to the other Ambassadors*) you also, sirs, that his secretary Messer Agabito will see you at once.

CAPELLO : For me, Messer Agabito will serve excellently.

GASPARO : And for me also.

CHAMBERLAIN : His highness will hope to see you before you leave. (*To Page.*) Tolomeo, conduct their notabilities to Messer Agabito.

[*The* PAGE *rises, and steps forward. The* CHAMBERLAIN *bows and withdraws again. The* AMBASSADORS *pass round to the steps, and up these, conducted by*

the PAGE, *who leads the way off along the gallery to the left.*

[SINIBALDI *bows to* PANTHASILEA, *who seats herself on the settle down left, with* GIULIA *behind her. He is turning away, when the main doors open abruptly and* GIANLUCA *surges in, the* SWISS *restraining him.*

SWISS : Nay, nay, noble sir ! Whither so fast ?

GIANLUCA (*wildly excited*) : Why do you detain me ? I . . . I . . . (*He espies Sinibaldi.*) I am of the household of Prince Sinibaldi. I have a message for him.

[SINIBALDI *stiffens.* PANTHASILEA *rises again.*

SWISS : Why didn't your worthiness say so ?

GIANLUCA : I've said so now. Let me pass.

SWISS : Not with that sword. No weapons are allowed within this door.

GIANLUCA : Oh, a plague on it. Here ! Take the thing.

[GIANLUCA *hastily lifts the sword from its carriages. The* SWISS *takes it and goes out, closing the doors again.* GIANLUCA *springs towards* PANTHASILEA. SINIBALDI *gets in his way.*

SINIBALDI : I trust, sir, that since you've made so free with my name, and connected yourself with me, you are not considering any rashness here. You'll remember where you are !

GIANLUCA (*fuming at the detention*) : Rashness ? Far from it, I am here to prevent a rashness.

SINIBALDI : By argument alone ?

GIANLUCA : How else ? Besides, man, they've taken my weapons. How they guard this pestilent duke !

SINIBALDI : Sh ! Be prudent, sir—for your own sake, and that of others. (*Impressively.*)

[*He turns and goes up, and slowly off, along the gallery to the left as the others went.*

[*The stage is now empty save for* GIANLUCA, PANTHA-

SILEA *and* GIULIA, *and the* SWISS *who stolidly parades the gallery at back and intermittently disappears.*

GIANLUCA: Thank God I am in time!

PANTHASILEA: In time for what? In time to ruin me? O, you are mad to have followed me here.

GIANLUCA: You are mad to have come. What can you hope to do? Come away, Lea. Come away at once.

PANTHASILEA: In all this week, Gianluca, you have tried my patience to the utmost. I have suffered it out of a mistaken tenderness.

GIANLUCA: Don't be angry with me, Lea; you know what it is that urges me to screen and guard you even from your own self.

PANTHASILEA: That knowledge has given me my patience. But this patience is worn out. By your madness, if you persist in it, you may ruin all, including yourself and me, and Solignola. So go!

GIANLUCA (*doggedly*): I will not go without you! I will not have you do this thing. I will not!

PANTHASILEA: You will not? By what right do you say that to me?

GIANLUCA (*snapping his fingers*): That for right! You shall not do it. You shall not brand yourself with this infamy—this Delilah work.

PANTHASILEA: Sh! You fool! Will you shout it from the housetops?—and have us both sent to the strangler? How dare you come ranting here, telling me what I shall and shall not do?

GIANLUCA (*desperately*): I am presumptuous in that I love you, Lea. That is why I abhor to see you shouldering so vile a task—making a lure of your matchless beauty, to . . .

PANTHASILEA: Stop!

[*For a moment they stand looking at each other.*

PANTHASILEA: You have gone the length of insult.

GIANLUCA: Forgive me, Lea!

PANTHASILEA: We will forget what you have said—all of it. As long as I am in Assisi, I must continue to use your house; but I trust that you will relieve me of your attendance, thus sparing me the memory of your offence.

GIANLUCA: Ah, Lea, I didn't mean it as you think. I . . .

PANTHASILEA: Messer Gianluca, to be frank, I care nothing what you meant. But I beg you to respect my wishes without driving me to take measures to enforce them.

[*The* COURTIERS *come sauntering back, along the gallery from the right.*

GIANLUCA (*furiously piqued*): Depend upon it, I shall not trouble you again . . . ever.

PANTHASILEA: Control your voice. We are no longer alone.

GIANLUCA: Madonna, I take my leave.

[*He bows curtly;* PANTHASILEA *turns her shoulder. He swings on his heel, and goes angrily out, as the* COURTIERS *come down the steps.*

GIULIA: Poor Messer Gianluca! He means you well, madonna.

PANTHASILEA: Maybe, but I think I shall be more comfortable in his indifference.

GIULIA: Are you sure, madonna, that he is not right?

PANTHASILEA (*sitting down again on the settle*): Perhaps he is. But I have that to do in which I must not count the cost. I must remember only all the lives that hang upon it, Giulia.

[*The main doors are violently opened by the* SWISS. *A* COURIER *enters, haggard, dust-covered, a leather satchel slung about his body. The* SWISS *faces towards the gallery, and roars.*

SWISS : Ho there ! Who waits ?

[*A* PAGE *appears suddenly from doorway left, and answers nervously.*

PAGE : Here !

SWISS : Where were you hiding ?

[RAMIREZ, SCIPIONE *and* FERRANTE *emerge from the same door, accompanied by* MICHELE DA CORELLA (*known as* MICHELETTO). *He is the most trusted of Cesare Borgia's captains and the highest in authority. He is a small, slight man, swarthy of face, with a black beard. He is bareheaded, and his hair is long, reaching to his shoulders. He is plainly dressed, as a soldier, but without armour, and his only visible weapon is a heavy dagger on his right hip.*

[*The* SWISS *continues to address the* PAGE.

SWISS : Here's a courier from Rome for the Duke's magnificence. Conduct him.

[*The* PAGE *goes up, the* COURIER *following him, and knocks at the door at back. The* CHAMBERLAIN *opens it, the* COURIER *is drawn inside, and the door closed again.*

[*The* PAGE *lounges down to the bench on the left under gallery. The* SWISS *meanwhile has withdrawn again, and closed the doors. The* CAPTAINS *have broken into conversation, as they saunter across to the right, towards the window.*

[*The* COURTIERS *are clustering down left about the table.*

RAMIREZ : Fifteen sieges have I conducted successfully in my day ; but may I be damned if ever I had to reduce such a place as this.

CORELLA : You haven't reduced it yet, and by your present methods I'll be damned if you ever will.

RAMIREZ (*snorting*) : Oho ! And why not, if you please, Micheletto ?

CORELLA : Because, they are of no avail.

RAMIREZ (*truculent*) : Who says so ?

CORELLA : I say so, and his highness says so.

RAMIREZ : That you should say so, Micheletto, and that his highness should say are two totally different things.

CORELLA : In this case, we both say the same thing.

RAMIREZ (*sneering*) : Of course you do. You may be depended upon to say what his highness says.

CORELLA : On the contrary ; it was I who drew the attention of his highness to this state of things.

RAMIREZ : When was that ?

CORELLA : Last night. I told his highness . . .

RAMIREZ : Oh ! You told his highness, did you ?

[*The* AMBASSADORS *return along the gallery from the left accompanied by* AGABITO. *The latter, Cesare Borgia's secretary, is dressed in black, and has almost the air of a cleric. His face is round and shaven and pale ; he is rather paunchy, and oily in his manner ; a man of between forty and fifty, with thin grey hair, kept short.*

[RAMIREZ *goes truculently on.*

RAMIREZ : And pray what did you tell him ?

CORELLA : Why, that if we are not to sit here for ever, some other plan of operations will have to be devised.

RAMIREZ : Oh ! And what was the plan you advised ?

CORELLA : I have made no suggestions yet.

RAMIREZ : Ah ! That is wise of you.

SCIPIONE : Now what do you mean by that, Ramirez ?

RAMIREZ (*exploding*) : Mean ? Lord of Heaven ! I mean that I'm a Spaniard—that's what I mean ; and that what a Spaniard doesn't know about the art of war, no Italian pimp in the world can teach him. (*In a towering rage.*) That's what I mean ! Do I make myself plain ?

[SCIPIONE *and* CORELLA *laugh at his rage.*

SCIPIONE : Ho, ho, ho ! A Spaniard, eh, Micheletto ?

CORELLA : It's lucky for you the duke can't hear you.

RAMIREZ : The duke ! If the duke is the greatest soldier in Italy that's because he's half a Spaniard. And I say it again, and who contradicts me is a liar. The Spaniard is the first soldier in the world.

SCIPIONE (*tauntingly, through laughter*) : Next to the Italian, Ramirez. Next to the Italian.

[*He and Corella go off into laughter again.*

RAMIREZ : What's to laugh at ?

SCIPIONE : You, you Spanish Rhodomont. Ho, ho, ho !

RAMIREZ (*laying a hand on his hilt*) : Rhodomont ! I take that from no man ; from no man in all this world.

CORELLA (*suddenly grave*) : Ramirez ! Be quiet, you fool !

RAMIREZ : He called me Rhodomont.

CORELLA : And now you're proving that he's right.

RAMIREZ : What's that ? (*He bares his sword.*) You miserable Italian capons !

[*There is a roar from* SCIPIONE *and* CORELLA *and counter-roars from* RAMIREZ *and from* FERRANTE, *who sides with him.* SCIPIONE *and* CORELLA *fling themselves upon* RAMIREZ *to disarm him. There are screams from the ladies, whilst the gallants, to increase the uproar and confusion, rush noisily in to separate the disputants. There is a seething, roaring mob to the right of the steps, and the two* PAGES *hover gleefully on the skirts of it, enjoying the fun.*

[*The* AMBASSADORS, *grouped left, watch the turmoil in alarm. Down stage,* PANTHASILEA *is soothing* GIULIA, *who has loosed a scream or two. Through the incoherent vociferations are heard intermittently the phrases :*

RAMIREZ : Teach me the art of war !

CORELLA : You Spanish buffoon !

RAMIREZ : You Italian dogs !

SCIPIONE : Let me come at you !

CORELLA : Quiet, you fool !

RAMIREZ : I'll carve your livers into ribbons !

[*The uproar and clamour have reached their height when suddenly, abruptly, as if a door had been shut, all is quiet. The seething mass disintegrates, and its members stand cowed and stricken, suddenly conscious of a presence.*

[*At the head of the steps* VALENTINOIS *stands looking down upon them, cold, severe, inscrutable.*

[*He is a young man of twenty-five, tall, elegant, virile. His face is pale, his eyes large and glowing. His auburn hair is bushed out behind into a clump, held by a fine network of gold. His paler auburn beard is delicately pointed. He wears on his head the scarlet cap of the gonfalonier, on his breast the collar of the order of St. Michael. He is dressed in a long surcoat of deep wine-coloured velvet that reaches almost to his feet, caught about his middle by a jewelled girdle, from which a dagger hangs on his hip. This surcoat is reversed with ermine. Under it he wears a doublet of cloth of gold, a wedge of which is seen at the breast, and the sleeves of which are revealed to the elbow, whence his arms emerge from the wide escalloped sleeves of the outer garment.*

[*After a pause in which he surveys the occupants of the antechamber, his cold, level, utterly dispassionate voice cuts sharply upon the silence.*

VALENTINOIS : Is this an antechamber, a tavern, or a stable ?

[*The* FOUR CAPTAINS *stand hang-dog.*

PANTHASILEA (*to* GIULIA, *breathlessly*) : Who is that ?

GIULIA : The Duke of Valentinois.

PANTHASILEA (*incredulously*) : That ? Oh, impossible !

VALENTINOIS : Am I become of no account ? Are there not ladies present ? (*Without raising his voice.*) That sword, Diego ? Why is it bare ? Did you draw it in my service ? (*More sharply.*) Answer me !

RAMIREZ (*faltering*) : Magnificent, I . . . we . . . had a . . . a difference. . . .

VALENTINOIS : Oh, you had a difference. Stand forth there.

[RAMIREZ *shuffles forward to the foot of the steps.* VALENTINOIS *turns to the* CHAMBERLAIN.

VALENTINOIS : The guard.

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *signs to the* SWISS *at the main entrance, who in his turn signs to someone else off right. A second* SWISS *advances, and together they come forward.* VALENTINOIS *comes down to the lowest step.*

VALENTINOIS : Give me that sword.

[RAMIREZ *surrenders it, but exclaims on a pleading note.*

RAMIREZ : Magnificent !

VALENTINOIS (*severely*) : In Urbino your turbulence was a source of infinite trouble to me, and it provided scandal-mongers with filth to cast upon my name. You were warned then. And now—this. You dog !

[RAMIREZ *recoils as if struck, exclaiming indignantly :*

RAMIREZ : Highness ! I am a soldier—a captain in . . .

VALENTINOIS : Captain of mine no longer.

[*To the* SWISS :

Take him away.

[*The* SWISS *swing* RAMIREZ *about.*

RAMIREZ (*between anger and fear*) : Highness ! Oh—h !

[*He is dragged off by his guards.* VALENTINOIS *looks sternly at the other captains.*

VALENTINOIS : Let this be a warning to you to adjust your differences in the future elsewhere than on my threshold.

[*He comes down left, towards the* AMBASSADORS. PANTHASILEA *looks on wide-eyed, a little bewildered.* VALENTINOIS *addresses the* AMBASSADOR OF FERRARA.

VALENTINOIS : Messer Mariano, we have the congratulatory letters from our noble cousin of Ferrara. Our love and duty to him. We hope to see him soon in Rome.

[MARIANO *bows.* VALENTINOIS *passes on.*

VALENTINOIS : My lord prince—and Messer Capello. Faith ! Venice is well-represented here.

SINIBALDI : The Serene Republic, magnificent, desires to give proofs of her respect and wonder.

VALENTINOIS : Ambassadorially she honours me beyond my poor deserts. And what, Messer Capello, is the newest gossip from the Mistress of the Adriatic ? What do they say of us in Venice now ? Whom have we recently murdered or betrayed ? What Cardinals has our father poisoned lately ? What new lover has our sister taken to her bed ?

CAPELLO (*aghast*) : These are jests, highness !

VALENTINOIS : They are. The jests of Venice—a city of jesters, clearly ; a little morbid perhaps in her pleasantries, a little dull in her invention. Still, when I need a fool I'll seek one in Venice.

[SINIBALDI *and* CAPELLO *mask their rage in mechanical smiles, exchanging looks eloquent of their common hate as* VALENTINOIS *passes on.*

VALENTINOIS : Messer Gasparo, you will inform your beautiful and accomplished Lady Isabella of Este of my delight in the masks she has had the sweet thought to send me. You shall tell her of their joyous use at a supper to which you are bidden for to-night. We deserve, I think, a little revelry after our latest labour of Hercules—the cleaning of the Augean Stable of the Romagna.

Meanwhile, and concerned with this, there is a spectacle of another sort preparing in the market-place here at Assisi. The Orsini traitors—the Duke of Gravina and his brother—will be strangled there at noon precisely.

[*There is a general movement followed by a rather awe-stricken stillness.*

VALENTINOIS : Letters from Rome bring me word of the arrest of Cardinal Orsini and the Archbishop of Florence. So that . . . (*he dismisses the matter with a wave and a sigh*). You will be impatient, sirs, to send that news to your governments. You have leave to go. We look to see you at our table to-night.

[*The* AMBASSADORS *bow, and make shift to withdraw.* VALENTINOIS *detains* MACCHIAVELLI, *placing a hand on the Florentine's arm.*

VALENTINOIS : You will oblige me by remaining, Ser Niccolò. The dispatches from the Signory are inconclusive. We must talk—you and I.

MACCHIAVELLI : Your highness is very gracious.

[VALENTINOIS *crosses* R. *to the* COURTIERS, *whilst the* AMBASSADOR *and* SINIBALDI *go towards the main doors.*

VALENTINOIS : Ladies, I would that my quarters here were worthier your gracing, and that my affairs gave me leisure to enjoy your presence. But we trust that fortune will make amends to-night if you will ennoble by your attendance the masque we are preparing. Till then, ladies, and you, my lords, you have our reluctant leave.

[*He bows, including* PANTHASILEA *in invitation and dismissal. The men return his bow, the ladies curtsy.*

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *throws open the main doors, and all troop out, save* PANTHASILEA *and* GIULIA, *who remain downstage left,* MACCHIAVELLI *near the table, with* AGABITO *and the* CAPTAINS *up right.* VALENTINOIS *turns to these, addressing* CORELLA.

VALENTINOIS: Well, Micheletto? Solignola is the only important Romagna State that still holds out. How long is it to continue to do so?

[PANTHASILEA *stiffens into attention.*

CORELLA: The devil knows, highness. There's never another stronghold like it in Italy. If your magnificence would come and view the siege works. . . .

VALENTINOIS: I've been. I rode out early this morning. The dispositions are elementary. We must do better if we are to make a speedy end.

CORELLA: The dispositions were Ramirez', my lord. If your highness will show us how . . .

VALENTINOIS: It is done. My secretary will show you. (*He calls over his shoulder.*) Agabito!

AGABITO (*advancing*): Highness.

VALENTINOIS: Take Captain da Corella, and show him the map I have prepared. Explain my notes to him. When you've studied it, Micheletto, I'll make clear anything that may remain in doubt. Go with him, Ferrante. You, Scipione, may remain.

[AGABITO *leads* CORELLA *and* FERRANTE *up and out through door at back.* VALENTINOIS *turns from them to* MACCHIAVELLI, *smiling.*

VALENTINOIS: And now, my wily, slippery Florentine eel. . . .

[*Seeing* PANTHASILEA *as he turns, he checks, and stands at gaze a moment. Then he distantly inclines his head.*

VALENTINOIS: Madonna, why do you wait? I gave leave to all awhile ago.

PANTHASILEA (*conquering the nervousness that besets her under his glance*): I . . . I came, my lord, for a special purpose.

VALENTINOIS (*smiling ironically*) : But for special purposes, madonna, there are the special people I have appointed to my service.

PANTHASILEA : Your patience, highness, but this is a matter upon which I could have little hope from any but yourself.

VALENTINOIS : Why so ?

PANTHASILEA : Because it is said of you that you are the soul of justice.

VALENTINOIS : Is it ? Of me ? Where is that said ? Whence are you, madonna ?

PANTHASILEA : From Spoleto, magnificent.

VALENTINOIS : And they say that of me in Spoleto, do they ? What ails them in Spoleto that they should speak the truth ?

PANTHASILEA : They have no cause to do otherwise, highness.

VALENTINOIS : They have no cause elsewhere in Italy. Nevertheless, you'll find that everywhere they speak—Italian. What is your name, madonna ?

PANTHASILEA : I am called Bianca Bracci, highness.

VALENTINOIS : Bracci ! An honourable name. And what may have brought you from the veracious city of Spoleto to this Assisi where the truth has probably not been heard since St. Francis died ?

PANTHASILEA : Family reasons, magnificent. I came a week ago—on the very day of your highness's arrival.

VALENTINOIS : Undeterred by it ?

PANTHASILEA : Encouraged by it, my lord.

VALENTINOIS : Ah ?

PANTHASILEA : It was not unnatural that I should desire to see for myself the most illustrious of the Gonfaloniers of Holy Church, the matchless soldier who has

restored the Romagna fiefs to the patrimony of St. Peter, the mirror of chivalry whom the King of France honours himself in honouring.

VALENTINOIS (*conning her with narrowed eyes*) : Flattery, madonna, may be the shortest cut to most men's confidence. It is the longest way to mine.

PANTHASILEA (*scandalized*) : Flattery ? I spoke from my heart.

VALENTINOIS : A courtier's heart by the ring of your words.

PANTHASILEA : No courtier, highness. I am country-bred. Nor have I said that you are all this. But merely that I had heard it said so.

VALENTINOIS : In Spoleto ?

PANTHASILEA : In Spoleto.

VALENTINOIS : Decidedly I must go to Spoleto. But you said, I think, that a special reason detains you here.

PANTHASILEA (*suddenly grave*) : They say of your highness that you are of a justice that is terrible but always just.

VALENTINOIS (*suspiciously*) : Is it justice you require of me ?

PANTHASILEA : I had with me a young waiting-woman—a mere child, who was good and pious, and beautiful—to her undoing perhaps, though I still pray that it may not be so. This child, Francesca Lidana is her name, has disappeared. She vanished yesterday afternoon.

[VALENTINOIS *stares at her in astonishment ; then he speaks with some indignation in his voice.*

VALENTINOIS : And you come to me ! You break in on me, who am engaged upon matters that may set nations tottering, with such a trumpery affair as this ?

PANTHASILEA (*heatedly*) : Trumpery ? Is brutal violence, perhaps the murder of one who is your subject,

maybe the ruin of a soul, a trumpery affair? (*With a half-sneer.*) They told me you were justice incarnate.

VALENTINOIS: I have established courts, madonna, to see that the public peace is kept and to protect persons and property. There is my Captain of Justice here in Assisi.

PANTHASILEA: I have appealed to him without satisfaction.

VALENTINOIS: What?

PANTHASILEA: I understand that such a court should hesitate to move against your soldiers—against your officers, perhaps.

VALENTINOIS: Why else have I established it? Or do you think that I govern like the Baglioni, the Malatesta, the Speranzoni, and all these other brigands who have preyed upon this unfortunate Romagna?

[PANTHASILEA *quivers at the mention of her own name; but instantly recovers.*

PANTHASILEA: It is because I do not that I have come to you.

VALENTINOIS (*after a moment's pause, as if irresolute*): Let me understand this thing. You spoke of violence and murder—hinting that it was the work of my men. What is the full tale of this woman's disappearance?

PANTHASILEA: I sent her on an errand. The streets were full of soldiers at the time. Myself I saw a group of men in your liveries—with the Bull escutcheon on their breasts—lounging before my house when she went forth.

VALENTINOIS: Where is your house?

PANTHASILEA: By the Temple of Minerva. It is the house of Messer Gianluca della Pieve. He is a distant relative.

VALENTINOIS: And you reside with him?

PANTHASILEA: Oh no, highness. In his house. He has ceded it to me.

VALENTINOIS: No matter. You saw the maid go forth. What next?

PANTHASILEA: That is all.

VALENTINOIS: All?

PANTHASILEA: Save that she has not yet returned.

VALENTINOIS: But you spoke of violence—of murder!

PANTHASILEA: What else is to be presumed? Why else should she continue absent?

VALENTINOIS: Little wonder that the Captain of Justice would not take action upon such slender grounds. Wait until the wench returns, madonna.

PANTHASILEA: But if she should not return?

VALENTINOIS: Seek my Captain of Justice again. He shall have orders from me.

PANTHASILEA: Of your charity—of your great justice, highness—will you not give those orders now, orders that search be made for her? Consider what the delay may mean to this poor child. Consider what it means to me, magnificent, who feel myself responsible to the mother who entrusted her to me.

VALENTINOIS (*smiling*): When I need an advocate, Monna Bianca, I shall send for you, I think. Content you. My Captain of Justice shall have commands at once to make such search as you may order.

[*He is standing by the table, and now as he speaks he stoops and scrawls some lines on a sheet of paper.*

VALENTINOIS: Go to him again with that, and give him all details he may ask. I trust your little maid may be restored to you undamaged. If otherwise—I shall see justice done.

PANTHASILEA (*effusively*): I knew that your potency would not deny me.

VALENTINOIS: You knew that no man could; and you traded a little upon that, I think, madonna. A dangerous—dangerous trade. But your gratitude must give proofs.

PANTHASILEA: Proofs?

VALENTINOIS: There are revels here to-night; a supper to the patricians of Assisi, to be followed by a masque. You will grace it with your presence, madonna.

PANTHASILEA: Your magnificence does me too much honour.

[*She curtsies.*

VALENTINOIS (*graciously*): So that you come, the honour will be of your conferring. Until to-night, Madonna Bianca.

PANTHASILEA (*assentingly, curtsying again*): Highness!

VALENTINOIS: The door, Scipione.

[SCIPIONE *hastens forward to hold the door for* PANTHASILEA, *who goes out with* GIULIA.

[VALENTINOIS *watches her off; then saunters up, speaking to* MACCHIAVELLI.

VALENTINOIS: A very beautiful woman, Master Secretary, and fully aware of it; knowing, too—mark you—though merely country-bred, that beauty is a coinage universally honoured. Ready, as I judge her, to spend it in purchasing whatever she may require of life.

MACCHIAVELLI: Your highness describes not a woman, but womankind.

VALENTINOIS: Oho!

MACCHIAVELLI: And this lady of Spoleto seemed in some ways extraordinary.

VALENTINOIS: You observed it, too, did you? I wonder does anything escape you.

MACCHIAVELLI: At least all those things that escape your highness; and many that do not.

VALENTINOIS: Faith, Ser Niccolô, you are yourself the chief of those things . . . (*He crosses to the window, and looks out.*) . . . the most elusive of them all.

MACCHIAVELLI : I, magnificent ! I am candour incarnate—transparent as glass.

VALENTINOIS (*pointing upwards to the arc of the windows*) : Stained glass—that allows the light to pass in, but nothing to pass out. (*He breaks off.*) Ah, there she goes, stepping so very proud and dainty. . . . Ah ! Who is that ? (*He cranes forward.*) Scipione, you are an Assisian. Who is that man standing in talk with her, do you know ?

[SCIPIONE *comes to his side at the window, and looks out.*

SCIPIONE : The gentleman is very vehement, highness.

VALENTINOIS : Vehement ! He is angry. Observe me his arms, thrashing the air like the sails of a windmill. There, now—do you see his face ?

SCIPIONE : Yes . . . Yes . . . that's it. He is Gianluca della Pieve.

VALENTINOIS : Gianluca della Pieve ? Ah, yes, her distant relative. He doesn't behave like a distant relative. A husband couldn't better the performance. (*Turning from the window.*) Gianluca della Pieve, eh ? Now where have I heard that name before ?

SCIPIONE : He is the gentleman who abstained when the patricians of Assisi swore fealty to your highness.

VALENTINOIS : Oh, yes. He was absent then. I wonder where he was. Anyway, he is present now, and he hasn't troubled to repair the omission. It almost seems as if his absence might have been intentional. (*He turns to the window again.*) Scipione, I should like to discover where Messer Gianluca della Pieve has been. I should like a word with him. Ah, there he goes, striding off. After him, Scipione. Desire him to attend me here at once.

SCIPIONE : And if he decline to come ?

VALENTINOIS (*dryly*) : Persuade him.

[SCIPIONE *hurries out by main doors.* VALENTINOIS *turns to* MACCHIAVELLI.

VALENTINOIS: I wonder now is a connection possible between his absence and the presence here in Assisi of that lady with whom he has the bad manners to be so very angry. Pshaw! I am beginning to start at shadows. But I have walked so long amid snares that . . . (*He shrugs, and laughs.*)

MACCHIAVELLI: That you understand the art of detecting them, however they may be dissembled.

VALENTINOIS: Do I? I wish I could detect the snare that treachery is preparing for me here in Assisi. I have seen signs, very vague as yet, but very familiar. (*He pulls open the breast of surcoat and doublet, displaying the meshes of a shirt of mail.*) I go in steel, and I never eat or drink without a venom taster at my elbow to take his chance of hell before me. This it is, Master Secretary, to be a conqueror. To walk ever in the shadow of assassins and worse than assassins. Do I rant?

MACCHIAVELLI: Nay, highness, I am admiring your restraint.

VALENTINOIS: Look at my work. This Romagna was a bloody playground for rapacious despots, brigands in authority, glutting themselves like vampires upon their miserable subjects; it has been cleaned out. Saving that robber's nest of Solignola, the work is done. The Malatesta, the Vitelli, the Varani, the Oliverotti and all the rest of that infamous brood of tyrants are gone. The place no longer reeks like a shambles. Men may breathe, and lift their heads, and go about their honest lives secure in the protection of my laws. Yet Venice plots my ruin, bespatters me with calumny, whilst sending me fawning ambassadors like Sinibaldi and Capello. Milan seeks to destroy my friendship with the King of France. Naples conspires with Spain to pull me down.

MACCHIAVELLI: That is the price of achievement. It begets envy. The man who has no enemies, magnificent, has nothing.

VALENTINOIS: Then am I rich, indeed! Here, I think, comes Scipione with our reluctant patrician.

[*The main doors open to admit* GIANLUCA, *ushered in by* SCIPIONE; GIANLUCA'S *air is one of extreme uneasiness.*

MACCHIAVELLI: I take my leave, magnificent. . . .

VALENTINOIS: No, no. Let me trespass a moment on your patience. We have yet to settle the terms of the treaty. This matter asks no secrecy.

SCIPIONE: Here, highness, is Messer Gianluca della Pieve.

VALENTINOIS: Ah, yes.

[*He comes slowly down, his eyes glitteringly intent upon* GIANLUCA'S *face, heightening the latter's uneasiness.*

VALENTINOIS: We have waited a week to give you welcome, sir. As we seemed in danger of having to forgo the honour, we were constrained to send for you.

[GIANLUCA *bows, his uneasiness growing to fear. He does not answer.*

VALENTINOIS: Although you are one of Assisi's first citizens, you were not present when the patricians took the oath on Sunday last. We shall be reassured by the reason for your absence.

GIANLUCA: I . . . I . . . I . . . was not in Assisi at the time, magnificent.

[VALENTINOIS *observes him narrowly, noticing his hesitation.*

VALENTINOIS: You were not in Assisi, eh?

GIANLUCA: No-o.

[*A pause.*

VALENTINOIS: Well, sir? Have you nothing to add? When did you return?

GIANLUCA: On . . . on the day after.

VALENTINOIS: Yet you made no effort to repair the omission.

GIANLUCA: I . . . I judged the opportunity had passed.

VALENTINOIS: I see. Tell me, Ser Gianluca, when did you leave Assisi?

GIANLUCA (*hesitating*): On the day of your potency's arrival.

VALENTINOIS: And what was the urgent business that took you from home at such a moment?

[GIANLUCA'S *uneasiness is visibly increased.* VALENTINOIS *observes it. His tone, silken hitherto, becomes suddenly of steel.*

VALENTINOIS: Dare you tell us that?

[GIANLUCA *starts.*

VALENTINOIS: Dare you tell us where you went?

[GIANLUCA *trembles at that tone of implied knowledge and menace.*

VALENTINOIS: You hesitate, eh? Faith, well you may. It begins to occur to you at last that they do not lie who say we have as many eyes as Argus, and that the men in whom I am interested cannot move far without my knowledge. Shall I tell you what you dare not tell me? Shall I tell you where you went, Messer Gianluca?

GIANLUCA (*deceived and terrified*): Your highness knows. . . !

VALENTINOIS: Of course I know. What are my spies employed for?

GIANLUCA (*in a tone of explanation and apology*): But, then . . . you must also know that Count Guido was my father's friend. We owed him many favours.

[VALENTINOIS' *surprise at the information thus trapped, shows a moment on his face, which is averted from* GIANLUCA. *There is a sharp movement from* SCIPIONE, *instantly restrained by* MACCHIAVELLI.

VALENTINOIS: I am not quarrelling with your ill-timed visit to Count Guido, nor yet with your friendship for him. My quarrel is with the motives that led you to seek him—motives which may cost you dear, Messer Gianluca.

GIANLUCA (*in increasing terror*): My lord, I . . . I . . . took no willing part in any of the measures concerted at Solignola.

[*Again there is a flash of understanding on* VALENTINOIS' *face.*

VALENTINOIS: You took no willing part, did you not? Do you expect me to believe you?

GIANLUCA: It is the truth, magnificent! I . . . I swear it before the Throne of Heaven.

VALENTINOIS: I require proofs, man; not oaths.

GIANLUCA (*abjectly*): I . . . I have no means of proving what I say.

VALENTINOIS: Indeed, you have, sir; and you'll afford it me if you would save your neck.

There is one proof you are overlooking. It is yours to use frankness with me now. Thus you may convince me of your honesty: that you were caught unawares in that net of treason. But you are careful to tell me nothing. (*He adds on a sudden inspiration.*) You do not even mention . . . the lady who was lately with me.

[GIANLUCA *recoils in fresh terror.*

GIANLUCA: My lord . . . since you know so much, you will understand the rest.

VALENTINOIS: To be sure, I do. But my present concern is with you personally, Ser Gianluca—to test your honesty.

GIANLUCA (*plunging*): Is it not natural, highness, that being determined upon resistance, Count Guido should have desired to place his daughter in safety—to remove her from the dangers and discomforts of a place besieged? In my having given her the shelter of my home is there anything that reflects upon my loyalty to your highness?

VALENTINOIS : Is this your honesty ? Is this how you prove that you are not my enemy ?

GIANLUCA : It is the truth, magnificent !

VALENTINOIS : It is a lie, I say—a foolish lie.

GIANLUCA (*indignation blending with fear*) : Highness !

VALENTINOIS : To pretend that Count Guido's daughter, with all Italy open to her, should come here for shelter, here to Assisi, here into my very camp—a dove into the falconry—is to prove yourself a man of poor invention. Your wits are numbed by your desperate need to find a cloak for the true reason of her presence. (*Harshly*) You abuse my patience, sir. You forget that I have the rack and the hoist at my command.

GIANLUCA : The rack and the hoist ! (*Indignantly*) For me, highness ! I am of patrician blood.

VALENTINOIS : A fig for your patrician blood ! Believe me, it sheds as easily as any other. They're shedding some of it—better blood than yours—in the market-place at this moment. Orsini blood, my friend. Shall I hesitate at yours ?

GIANLUCA : Neither rack nor hoist could extract another word from me. I have no more to tell.

VALENTINOIS : You have no more to tell me, eh ? An ambiguous phrase, sir. But I think I read its real meaning. We shall test it later. Scipione, take Messer della Pieve, and place him under arrest until I make known my pleasure.

SCIPIONE (*to Gianluca*) : You hear, sir. Come.

[GIANLUCA *hesitates a moment, then with a shrug resigns himself, and goes out by the main doors with* SCIPIONE. *As the doors close,* VALENTINOIS *looks at* MACCHIAVELLI, *and laughs between amusement and bitterness.*

VALENTINOIS : Well ? Do I start at shadows, or is there a substance behind them ? That young man has

told us something we were very far from suspecting. Panthasilea degli Speranzoni is here in Assisi calling herself Bianca Bracci of Spoleto. She thrusts herself upon my notice on a trumped-up matter, as I suspect. Her real object is to enlist my attention and ensnare my senses. Can you read that riddle ?

MACCHIAVELLI : It is extremely simple. She is the bait in the trap that's set for your highness.

VALENTINOIS : That, sir, is what I've been telling you. The riddle is the nature of the trap itself. Can you resolve it.

MACCHIAVELLI : Can your highness ?

VALENTINOIS : Not yet, elusive Socrates. But I shall ; and then . . .

MACCHIAVELLI : Heaven help Panthasilea degli Speranzoni.

VALENTINOIS : Ay ! I think she'll need the help of Heaven. (*Abruptly thrusting the matter aside.*) And now, my friend, touching the terms of this treaty with your Florentine masters. . . .

[*He flings himself into the chair at the table,* MACCHIAVELLI *standing beside it.*

THE CURTAIN IS LOWERED

The evening of the same day.

Having been lowered for a moment to mark the lapse of time, the curtain rises again upon the same scene. The table has been drawn down a little farther to the left and is set lengthwise up and down stage. The arm-chair is on the left of it; there are writing materials on this table, and a candlestick with a lighted candle on a tray. The latter and a couple of lanterns suspended from the ceiling supply the light of the chamber, which is subdued, leaving the gallery at the back in gloom. The door in the left flat stands open, and a glowing light occasionally increases and reddens to the accompaniment of the audible sighing of bellows. Shadows of men (off in this room on the left, which is being used as a torture chamber) flit across the light proceeding thence at the opening of the scene.

At Rise of Curtain, Agabito Gherardi *is pacing up and down waiting. The door at the end of the gallery (off left) opens. This is conveyed by a beam of light along the gallery and a whiff of languid dance-music played in a distant part of the palace. The light is instantly cut off as the door is closed again.* Corella *has entered the gallery. He advances into view, and speaks as he comes down.*

Corella : Is everything ready, Messer Agabito ?

Agabito (*surly*) : Ready ? (*He waves a hand towards the torture chamber.*) I've been waiting this half-hour.

Corella : His highness is reluctant to leave the dance; as I am, and with less cause. But he'll be here directly. Where's the prisoner ?

Agabito : Messer Gianluca has been roused, and awaits the duke's pleasure in his cell.

Corella : And meanwhile the duke's pleasure lies elsewhere; and who shall blame him ? I grudge these moments stolen from the revels, and God knows I'm no lancing pimp. Why the devil couldn't this business have waited until morning ?

AGABITO : It's the duke's way : always the unexpected. No one ever knows what's really in his mind. Not even I, his secretary, who know more than most men.

CORELLA : Hum ! I could hazard a guess of what's in his mind to-night. Have you ever heard of Love, Messer Agabito ?

AGABITO (*disgusted*) : Love ! Pshaw ! Don't be a fool, Micheletto.

CORELLA : Oh, to be sure, you're half a priest ; and so you think that whilst God created man, the devil invented woman. According to some of you the devil invented everything that's pleasant. Well, thanks to him we are very merry up there to-night.

AGABITO : So I judge by the sounds.

CORELLA : And the duke is merry—merriest of all. He's fallen headlong into the toils of an Assisian beauty . . . No ; not Assisian. . . . She is from Spoleto. Bianca Bracci is her name. A splendid woman. You should see her, Master Secretary. She'd quicken your sluggish old pulses, warm your coagulating old blood.

AGABITO : Pshaw !

CORELLA : She's fired his highness.

AGABITO : His highness ?

CORELLA : I've never seen him so beglamoured. Never. He placed her beside him at supper, and sat as nearly in her lap as decency permitted. Then he led her out to dance, as though she were the first lady in the place. But I tell you she's worthy of the honour. A magnificent woman, Messer Agabito.

AGABITO : Faugh !

CORELLA : I believe you feed on parchments and sealing-wax, and your veins are filled with ink. Why . . . who's this ?

[*The main doors, down right, are opened by the* SWISS *guarding them, who enters to admit* SCIPIONE.

SCIPIONE : Where's his highness ?

CORELLA (*surprised*) : Scipione ! What the devil are you doing here ? Your place is in the lines under Solignola.

[SCIPIONE *comes forward. Two guards with a pinioned clown between them now appear and follow him in.*

SCIPIONE : I have just come from there with this joker. (*Pointing to clown.*) Where's the duke, I say ?

[VALENTINOIS *appears in the gallery. He is resplendent in a ball dress of white and gold (i.e., doublet of cloth of gold, edged with ermine, and either white hose or hose that is striped white and yellow) ; he wears his collar of St. Michael, a jewelled girdle, and there are tiny jewels in the network that confines his hair ; there is also a large jewel—a long pearl—in his left ear ; he is bareheaded. A pomander ball of filigree gold, and of the size of a small orange, dangles by a fine gold chain from his left wrist. Mainly he holds it in his hand, and makes play with it to his nostrils throughout the scene.*

VALENTINOIS : I am here. What is it ?

SCIPIONE : Highness, I have brought you this clown, caught in the act of slipping through the lines of Solignola. He carries this letter ; but he refuses to say who sent him, or to give us any satisfaction whatever.

[*The music off dies down and ceases ; the door being still open.*

VALENTINOIS : If he has a letter. . . . That should tell us.

SCIPIONE : But it is in cipher, magnificent.

VALENTINOIS : Give it to me.

[*He takes the letter from* SCIPIONE, *considers it a moment by the light of the candle on the table.*

VALENTINOIS : Feminine characters, I should judge.

[*He bears it to his nostrils and sniffs it.*

VALENTINOIS: I've breathed that perfume before . . . and very lately.

[*Sudden suspicion lights his face. He cons the document again; then turns to the prisoner, speaking quietly.*

VALENTINOIS: At what hour did the Countess Panthasilea degli Speranzoni dispatch you to Solignola with this letter?

[GINO (*the clown*) *falls back thunderstruck. He stares a long moment at the duke, then cries out in a quavering voice.*

GINO: Men speak the truth of you!

VALENTINOIS: Rarely, my friend; believe me; very rarely. What particular truth have you been hearing?

GINO: That you have made a compact with the devil.

VALENTINOIS: It's as true as most things that are said of me. (*To Corella.*) Take this poor clown away, Micheletto, and let him be confined in solitude.

[*He waves the guards away. They thrust* GINO *out,* CORELLA *following them, and closing the door.*

[VALENTINOIS *beckons* AGABITO.

VALENTINOIS: No need to waste time on him, when the letter will tell us all we want to know. Transcribe it for me, Agabito.

[AGABITO *sits down, takes the letter, and stares at it.*

AGABITO: But the cipher, highness?

VALENTINOIS: The key has been obligingly supplied. Study that signature. It contains eleven numerals. The second, sixth and last are all the same. So also are the second, sixth and last of the eleven letters of the name Panthasilea. Assume it to be that, and see what comes of it. It supplies you half the alphabet.

[AGABITO *stares a moment, then takes up his pen, and gets quickly to work.* VALENTINOIS *turns to* SCIPIONE.

VALENTINOIS: Where have they bestowed Ramirez?

SCIPIONE : Ramirez ! He is above stairs, highness.

VALENTINOIS : I shall want him presently, and I shall also want his sword. It is in my closet. Go fetch them both.

SCIPIONE (*eagerly*) : With submission, highness, dare I hope that you mean to deal mercifully with him ?

VALENTINOIS : Have you ever known me merciful to insubordination ?

[CORELLA *re-enters.*

SCIPIONE : Ramirez has the faults that go with his virtues, highness . . .

VALENTINOIS (*sharply*) : Enough ! About it !

[SCIPIONE *bows hurriedly, and goes out by the gallery.*

VALENTINOIS *turns to* CORELLA.

VALENTINOIS : This prisoner della Pieve ? Where is he ?

CORELLA : In his cell. Ready whenever your highness pleases.

VALENTINOIS : Fetch him.

[CORELLA *goes out.*

VALENTINOIS : Well, Agabito ? Is it done ?

[AGABITO *rises, holding a written sheet from which he reads.*

AGABITO : " I engaged his attention at last this morning, and I am bidden to a masque he is holding to-night. A promising beginning. Within a week I count upon an opportunity to carry out my aims. Let this enhearten you to do your part. PANTHASILEA."

[VALENTINOIS *takes the sheet in his own hand, and cons it, reading on a musing inflexion.*

VALENTINOIS : " I count upon an opportunity to carry out my aims " . . . My aims ? " All is ready . . ." Ready ? (*Hearing steps off.*) Here comes Messer Gianluca. You have your instructions ?

AGABITO (*tapping papers on the desk*): They are here, magnificent.

VALENTINOIS: To it, then. Examine him, as if I were not present.

[*He goes up into the shadows of the gallery.* AGABITO *resumes his seat.*

[*The door opens, and* CORELLA *appears on the threshold.*

CORELLA: The prisoner is here, sir.

AGABITO: Let him enter. And do you, Captain, place guards at the end of the gallery and suffer no one to pass.

[CORELLA *steps aside.* GIANLUCA *comes into view (from the right) between guards in the Borgia livery. He is wrapped in a cloak, his countenance is pale and wide-eyed with fear.* AGABITO *claps his hands and* TWO EXECUTIONERS *enter from doorway left. They are brawny men, in skin-tight garments, like wrestlers, the torso cased in leather, the arms bare from the shoulder. They receive* GIANLUCA *from his guards, who withdraw.* CORELLA *goes up and out by gallery. Dance music, tripping and trivial, strikes up in the distance just before the door is opened by the departing* CORELLA *and is heard, though muffled now, after it has closed. The* EXECUTIONERS *drag* GIANLUCA *forward, visibly shrinking in horror of them. They pull off and cast away his cloak. From the waist upward he remains clad only in his shirt. They stand him immediately opposite to* AGABITO, *and themselves fall back a little.* GIANLUCA *has not seen* VALENTINOIS, *who should be as nearly as possible invisible.*

GIANLUCA: What do you want with me?

[AGABITO'S *voice is cold and dispassionate.*

AGABITO: Messer Gianluca della Pieve, you are guilty of plotting with Count Guido degli Speranzoni, Tyrant of Solignola, against the High and Mighty Lord Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois and Romagna, Prince of Andria and Venafri; and of having prepared here in

Assisi a pitfall for this same high and mighty lord. Thereby you have deserved death. But worse than death have you deserved when it is considered that his highness is Gonfalonier of Holy Church, that the battles he fights are the battles of the Holy See. Thus you offend not only against the Duke's Magnificence, but against God and His earthly Vicar, Our Holy Father, the Pope. Yet since the Church in her infinite mercy has said "Nolo mortem peccatoris, sed ut magis convertatur et vivat," his Highness, in our Holy Father's name, desires to spare you, so that you make frank and full confession of your offence.

GIANLUCA: I have nothing to confess.

AGABITO: Look yonder, and assure yourself that we do not lack the means to unseal your lips if you prove obstinate. We have at our command cord and fire and water. Be sure that when we cannot twist out truth, we can burn it out or flood it out.

GIANLUCA: You have not the right. It is not lawful. I am a patrician; by my birth and blood immune from torture.

AGABITO: Had you offended merely against an earthly potentate, that plea might avail you. It cannot avail you here. So be reasonable, and confess.

GIANLUCA (*obstinately*): I have nothing to confess.

[AGABITO *sighs heavily. His voice is sad.*

AGABITO: Executioners, do your office. First, the hoist.

[*The* EXECUTIONERS *seize* GIANLUCA. *One of them twists the patient's wrists behind him, the other pinions them.*

GIANLUCA (*in a moan*): No . . . No.

[VALENTINOIS *emerges into view.*

VALENTINOIS: Wait!

[*He waves the* EXECUTIONERS *away. They fall back, leaving him alone with* GIANLUCA *in midstage.*

[GIANLUCA, *amazed by his sudden appearance, stares at him in terrified fascination.* VALENTINOIS' *face is sad, his eyes pitiful, his voice very soft and persuasive.*

VALENTINOIS: Messer Gianluca, consider what you do. Consider what is before you. You may have seen the hoist at work; you have perhaps seen it wrench a man's arms from their sockets. (*He places a hand on Gianluca's shoulder, and tightens its grip.*)

[GIANLUCA *winces, writhes and cries out in pain.*

VALENTINOIS: Consider by that how little you are fitted to endure the cord. Be assured that you will speak in the end. And when you have spoken, what do you think must follow? Once the hoist has gripped you, you become the property of the law, and when the law has made you speak, the law will silence you forever. From the agonies of a broken body, your release lies through the strangler's hands.

[GIANLUCA, *shaking off the spell of the other's persuasiveness, his voice strident.*

GIANLUCA: I . . . I have nothing to tell you. Your arts cannot conquer me.

VALENTINOIS: They are very compassionate arts, compassionately employed. I admonish you to confess, so that you may be forgiven, so that you may spare that fair body from being broken and destroyed. Judge whether I admonish you in any interests but your own, when I tell you that you can confess nothing—nothing material—that is not already known to me.

GIANLUCA (*with a laugh, half-hysterical, half-ironic*): Is it because all is known to you that you are at such pains to make me speak?

[VALENTINOIS *moves away; he speaks frostily, indifferently, the pomander to his nostrils.*

VALENTINOIS: I see that I must leave you to the tormentors. I have no time to waste in convincing you, for Madonna Panthasilea awaits me impatiently above stairs. She waits for me with smiles of allurement that might be very dangerous did I not know them false and treacherous as the false name of Bianca Bracci by which she calls

herself. Her net is spread, and richly baited with her own luscious beauty; and she waits confident of her haul; so confident that already this evening has she written to her father—the scoundrel father who has committed her to this vileness—that within a week her work will be complete.

[*He looks at* GIANLUCA, *who is gaping awe-stricken. He laughs.*

VALENTINOIS: You see? Do you still think that you can discover anything that will harm your friends? Do you still doubt that I am other than compassionate when I admonish you to have pity on yourself?

GIANLUCA: But what is there left to tell? Already you appear to know more than I do.

VALENTINOIS: There is one little thing you can discover for me. The precise nature of this snare that has been set. Tell me that, and you shall have your life and immunity from this.

GIANLUCA: I cannot. You shall have no evidence from me that you can use to this lady's hurt.

[*In the passionate tone,* VALENTINOIS *detects* GIANLUCA'S *true feeling for the lady. His understanding is reflected on his face. He pauses a moment, then speaks quietly again.*

VALENTINOIS: To her hurt? Haven't I evidence enough already? If you would serve her, you will answer me, for if you don't I may have to place her where you now stand.

GIANLUCA (*in horror*): What?

VALENTINOIS: Unless I know enough to avoid the trap, I must take measures to protect myself. The first of these will be to have Monna Panthasilea strangled.

GIANLUCA: Oh-h!

VALENTINOIS: What else? Am I unreasonable to value my own life more than I value hers?

GIANLUCA : Your life ? Your life is not aimed at !

VALENTINOIS : So, so ! I thought there was more than murder here. What, then ? Answer me if you would save yourself and her.

GIANLUCA (*after a pause*) : Oh, God pity me ! I can't !

[VALENTINOIS *considers him a moment.*

VALENTINOIS : Very well. Then I will send for her. (*To the* EXECUTIONERS.) Loosen his bonds. Restore him his cloak.

[*He is obeyed, to* GIANLUCA'S *increasing bewilderment.*

VALENTINOIS : When she comes I will confront her with you, her accuser and betrayer.

GIANLUCA : You fiend ! You—a prince, a great conqueror—and you'd stoop to that vile lie.

VALENTINOIS : It is the truth.

GIANLUCA : The truth.

VALENTINOIS : The truth, you fool. It was you who first betrayed her identity to me this morning when I questioned you. It was you who disclosed to me this plot, of which until then I had not dreamed.

GIANLUCA (*in agony*) : O God ! You tricked me.

VALENTINOIS : Will she believe that ? Will she believe that coming straight from quarrelling with her, it was by accident that you betrayed her ?

GIANLUCA : You devil ! Do your worst ! I will say nothing further to her hurt.

VALENTINOIS : To her hurt ? It is your silence that will hurt her. Come, come, Messer Gianluca, will you speak now or will you wait until you see her stretched upon the rack ?

GIANLUCA : The rack ! For her ! You cannot ! You dare not !

VALENTINOIS : Dare not ! (*To Agabito.*) Tell Micheletto to bring Monna Panthasilea . . . Monna Bianca Bracci here.

[AGABITO *moves to obey.*

GIANLUCA (*in frenzy*): Oh, God help me! Wait! Wait! I'll . . . I'll . . .

VALENTINOIS: My patience is running out.

GIANLUCA (*headlong*): I'll tell you. I'll tell you.

VALENTINOIS: Speak, then!

GIANLUCA: The aim of the plot is to take you alive, and carry you to Petrucci at Siena, there to hold you as a hostage whilst extracting terms from the Pope.

VALENTINOIS: Aha! And how is this to be accomplished?

GIANLUCA: I don't know. That was a matter to be determined by Monna Panthasilea as the opportunity should serve her.

[VALENTINOIS *looks steadily into his face, and nods at last.*

VALENTINOIS: What assistance has she here in Assisi?

GIANLUCA: I don't know. She depended upon me. But I rebelled against her using herself in this unworthy way. It was on that we quarrelled, and I swore to hold aloof.

VALENTINOIS: So that she will not find your absence strange. Hum! (*He turns abruptly, claps his hands and calls.*) Micheletto!

[*The door at the end of the gallery opens, and* CORELLA *advances; the music swells up in the closing strains of the dance, and presently ceases altogether.*

VALENTINOIS: Take Messer Gianluca della Pieve back to his prison. See that he is closely guarded.

[MICHELETTO *opens doors of main entrance; at a sign from him the guards re-enter.* GIANLUCA *staggers up, a man overwrought.*

GIANLUCA: What are you going to do to her?

VALENTINOIS: What! Ah! Opportunity shall prompt me.

GIANLUCA : You'll not harm her !

VALENTINOIS : For the evil she intends me, she shall receive good in return.

GIANLUCA : Good !

VALENTINOIS : Is not justice good ? And she shall have that, I promise you. Strict justice. Neither more nor less.

GIANLUCA (*writhing in the grip of his guards*) : You devil ! You mocking, remorseless devil ! You'll not dare to harm her ! You devil . . . you . . .

[*Still ranting, he is thrust out by the guards,* CORELLA *following, and the door is closed.*

[*The* EXECUTIONERS *take themselves off by the doorway left.*

VALENTINOIS (*to Agabito*) : You can go, Agabito. Your work is done for to-night. But leave me that letter, and the transcript. (*He takes it from Agabito.*)

AGABITO (*affably, as he departs*) : A happy night, magnificent.

VALENTINOIS : Good-night ! Good-night !

[AGABITO *goes up.*

VALENTINOIS : Bid Scipione bring Ramirez. But do not yet remove the guard from the gallery door.

[AGABITO *goes off by gallery.* VALENTINOIS *sits conning the paper.*

VALENTINOIS (*reading*) : 'All is ready' . . . 'My aims.' My aims. What aims ?

[SCIPIONE *enters, carrying Ramirez' sword in the crook of his arm.* RAMIREZ *follows him. Stepping forward, the latter puts out his hands appealingly.*

RAMIREZ : My lord, I am an unworthy fool, but . . .

VALENTINOIS (*forbiddingly*) : Wait ! (*To Scipione.*) Set that sword on the table, there. (*Valentinois folds the letter into its original creases.*) Here, Scipione. It's a plain

seal. See it mended, and then have the letter conveyed into Solignola and delivered to Count Guido. Let one of your own men take it, disguising himself as a clown. And mark this: you are to capture no more messengers at present.

SCIPIONE: I am to allow letters to pass into Solignola?

VALENTINOIS: Freely and unchallenged. Such messages as they receive are likely to lull their vigilance, and we shall find it easier to complete the mine without interference. I shall ride over in the morning with Micheletto, and give you clear instructions about the excavations, and also about mounting batteries elsewhere as a blind upon our real aim. You may go.

SCIPIONE (*bowing*): Highness!

[*He goes out, after an intrigued and sympathetic glance in the direction of the waiting Ramirez.* VALENTINOIS *sits down at the table. As the door closes, he takes up the sword, and looks at Ramirez.*

VALENTINOIS: Well, Ramirez? You had something to say to me, I think.

RAMIREZ: Only to plead with your highness. I admit my fault. I am a hot-blooded, quick-tempered scoundrel, and I deserve your anger. But I urge my tried loyalty as a plea for more merciful punishment than dismissal from your service.

VALENTINOIS: You find it harsh?

RAMIREZ: Almost as harsh and dishonouring as the epithet your highness cast at me. To call me "dog"—and publicly! I am a soldier, scarred in your service and of proven excellence as a leader . . .

VALENTINOIS: And of an equally proven fidelity to me. Am I a fool, Ramirez, or are you?

RAMIREZ: Your highness means?

VALENTINOIS: I have not many servants like you, Ramirez; hardly another whom I esteem so highly;

certainly no other whom I trust more fully. To dismiss you for a trivial fault, I must be a fool. To believe that I could mean it, you must be a fool.

RAMIREZ : I don't understand.

VALENTINOIS : Dullard ! I dismissed you publicly in the terms I employed, for the belief of others, not your own. If I called you " dog " in public, I call you " friend " in private. It was necessary for the service I require of you.

[*He holds out the sword to Ramirez.* RAMIREZ *bounds forward to take it.*

RAMIREZ : Highness !

VALENTINOIS : Listen. There is a plot here in Assisi, which aims at my liberty, possibly at my life. Go forth now, breathing vengeance, a man bitterly wronged, dismissed before witnesses, harshly and with infamy. Denounce me publicly in terms as infamous. Proclaim me a thief, a liar, a murderer, what you will. But let yourself be freely heard. Announce it as your aim, henceforth, to avenge the affront I put upon you. Make big talk of your impugned Castilian honour. You will not have long to wait before your hate is offered employment. You will be just the tool for treacherous hands. You understand ?

RAMIREZ : Completely. I am your man, my lord.

VALENTINOIS : Good ! About it, then, my friend.

RAMIREZ : The taverns of Assisi shall ring to-night with your highness's misdeeds.

VALENTINOIS : Excellent ! The ambassadors of the Most Serene Republic will imagine themselves back in Venice.

RAMIREZ : Oh, if I had but known . . .

VALENTINOIS : Your instincts should have told you. Call Micheletto, as you go. God be with you !

[RAMIREZ *opens the door and calls.*

RAMIREZ : Micheletto ! To the duke !

[CORELLA *appears on the threshold.*

VALENTINOIS : Let Diego Ramirez go. He is free.

CORELLA (*eagerly*) : Your highness has . . .

VALENTINOIS (*forbiddingly*) : He is free. That is all.

[RAMIREZ *goes out.*

VALENTINOIS : You may go. Remove the guards from the end of the gallery. Let my guests roam at will.

[CORELLA *departs by the gallery, leaving the door open. Dance-music begins again in the distance.*

[VALENTINOIS *sits a moment silently meditative. Then he takes up the transcript of the letter, scans it, and reads it aloud.*

VALENTINOIS : " Within a week I count upon an opportunity to carry out my aims." Within a week ! Ha !

[*He holds the sheet in the flame of one of the candles, whereby it is consumed. As it burns the voices of several men and women, gay and laughing, are heard off left. Presently one voice emerges clearly from the confused aggregate of sound.*

PANTHASILEA (*off*) : Where do you say that the duke hides himself ?

[VALENTINOIS *raises his head sharply, his eyes gleam.* CORELLA'S *voice is heard vaguely answering.*

CORELLA (*off*) : He is in the ante-chamber.

[*A moment later* PANTHASILEA *with* SINIBALDI *and* REMOLINO *enter along the gallery.* PANTHASILEA'S *manner is gay, laughter vibrates through her words. Gorgeously dressed, a mask hangs from her wrist.*

PANTHASILEA : Here is his highness ! Fled to shelter from the chatter of his guests.

VALENTINOIS (*rising*) : The rebuke is merited, madonna. I am an indifferent host.

PANTHASILEA: Oh, worse—far worse—an insensible one. Your magnificence fled the dance with which you had engaged yourself to honour me.

VALENTINOIS: But how reluctantly! Driven by the merciless duties of my office.

[*She comes down, her companions following. Looking through the doorway on the left, and perceiving the nature of the place, she checks and shudders. She speaks in a voice laden with horror.*

PANTHASILEA: Your duties brought you here!

VALENTINOIS: Yes. But those engines were not concerned in it. I merely came to a council with my officers on the means for reducing Solignola.

PANTHASILEA: They tell me that it is a very strong place. Does your highness look to reduce it soon?

VALENTINOIS: Within ten days at most. Within a week if I am fortunate. Oh, yes—" within a week I count upon an opportunity to carry out my aims."

[*The phrase touches a memory in Panthasilea's mind. Her eyes dilate.*

SINIBALDI: That were a speedy solution, indeed, highness.

VALENTINOIS (*laughing, carelessly*): Pooh! I am not concerned to make it speedier. That is all. Although his Holiness is clamouring for my return to Rome, I can no longer be in haste to go. (*He looks intently at Panthasilea.*) I have found too much to attract and hold me here in Assisi.

[*He bows to her. She laughs nervously.*

PANTHASILEA: Remembering how you fled the dance. I cannot suspect that the attraction is supplied by any of your guests.

VALENTINOIS: It is your pleasure to be cruel. I have pleaded my excuse. Show me that I am forgiven by

suffering me to make amends. The music calls us, Monna Bianca. Shall we go ?

PANTHASILEA : With all my heart. (*Glancing left again.*) I am chilled with horror here.

[*He takes her hand to lead her out, signing to the others to precede him.* SINIBALDI *and* REMOLINO *go up. He follows with her ; then, checks to answer.*

VALENTINOIS : I should have spared you that. It is a sight for felons only—specially for those unspeakable creatures who by betrayal and falsehood burrow to their ends. It is haunted by the anguish to which their treachery brought them in the end. Ah ! it makes you shudder ! Well it may. Come, Monna Bianca. Let us find a setting more proper for the rare jewel of your beauty.

[*He bows low over her hand, bearing it towards his lips. She withdraws it, crying out in protest.*

PANTHASILEA : Highness ! Too great an honour !

VALENTINOIS : An honour I must pay this lovely hand, even though I perceived it to carry death for me.

[*As bending again he kisses it, she looks straight before her in sheer terror.*

[*From the gallery,* SINIBALDI *looks on slyly exultant,* CARDINAL REMOLINO *smiling indulgently.*

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS.

ACT III

ACT III

A Room in the Pieve Palace at Assisi.

A nobly proportioned room, the walls tapestried, the ceiling frescoed, the floor paved in black and white marbles.

In the back flat three glass doors open upon a balustraded terrace. Three steps from the stage level lead up to these doors. Beyond the balustrade we see a moonlit garden, dimly figured on the back cloth, with spear-like cypresses standing black against the faintly luminous sky.

There are four sets of twin pillars at the back, two of these being placed between the windows, the other two flanking them. A rod crosses these pillars near their capitals, carrying leather curtains which are gilded, and tinted in dull reds and blues.

There are double doors in the right flat; about midway up and above them, this flat sets on an angle to the back, with a small single door in it. This is the door to Panthasilea's bedroom.

There is a large, projecting fireplace with a broad overmantel low down on the left. Below this stands an armchair. Raked across stage, just above the fireplace, there is a long settle of carved wood, with leather cushions. Above this settle stands a wooden lectern on which an open volume—an illuminated manuscript. A little to the right of midstage there is a fairly substantial table, at which are placed two armchairs, all of carved and gilded wood, the chairs being upholstered in wrought and tinted leather. On this table a gold salver, bearing a gold beaker, and three tall venetian glasses.

A candlebranch of gold carrying six lighted candles is placed upon the broad overmantel. From this the room is suffused with golden light, which contrasts with the cold moonlight outside.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN *the middle window stands open to the terrace.*

GIULIA *is alone, lounging on the settle.*

Immediately the doors R. are opened by GIOVANNI, *who* ENTERS.

GIULIA *swings her feet to the ground, and sits up.*

GIULIA : What is it, Giovanni ?

GIOVANNI : Prince Sinibaldi is here, Monna Giulia, craving audience of madonna.

GIULIA (*rising*) : Madonna is in her room. But admit his excellency. I will call her.

[GIOVANNI *bows, and holding the doors open ushers* SINIBALDI, *then withdraws.*

GIOVANNI : This way, excellency.

[SINIBALDI *comes in quickly. He is wrapped in a cloak, and he carries a broad round hat. These he casts aside as he advances.*

SINIBALDI : Monna Panthasilea . . . Where is she ?

GIULIA : Sh ! My lord ! That name is never mentioned here. Monna Bianca is in her room. I will call her.

SINIBALDI : Pray do.

[*As she is turning again,* SINIBALDI'S *voice arrests her.*

SINIBALDI : Stay, Monna Giulia ! Tell me : What is it that has miscarried in our plans ?

GIULIA (*at a loss*) : Miscarried, excellency ?

SINIBALDI : Why have the duke's visits ceased abruptly ? For two days—yesterday and to-day—he has not been near your lady. Does he . . . does he suspect ?

GIULIA : How does your excellency know that he has not been ?

SINIBALDI : How do I know ? Just as I know—just as all Assisi knows—that for four days he was assiduous in his visits. For two hours and more each afternoon the street was blocked by his waiting escort.

GIULIA (*laughing*): That is why.

SINIBALDI: That is why? Why what?

GIULIA: By his devotion he was rendering madonna the talk of all Assisi. For her reputation's sake she desired him to practise more discretion.

SINIBALDI: Discretion! Surely this is not a time for prudish qualms!

[PANTHASILEA *enters from her bedroom, of which a glimpse is obtained as the door opens.*

GIULIA: Here comes madonna herself.

[SINIBALDI *swings round.* PANTHASILEA *advances into the room; then pauses, considering him.*

PANTHASILEA: Prince Sinibaldi! Is this wise? If you were seen entering my house . . .

SINIBALDI: What then? It is known that I am acquainted with Monna Bianca Bracci of Spoleto. Have we not danced together at the Communal? How, then, is it strange that like the Lord Cesare Borgia, I should come to pay my homage to the fairest lady in Assisi?

PANTHASILEA (*advancing and speaking coldly*): Is that all that brings you?

SINIBALDI: I would it were. I come in apprehension—to inquire why Valentino's visits have ceased at such a moment.

[PANTHASILEA'S *manner is chill and aloof. She is a woman moving now mechanically in a task that has become repellent. Her distaste for* SINIBALDI *is manifest, and merely held in check by her appreciation of his position and her own.*

PANTHASILEA: Have they ceased?

SINIBALDI: For two days—yesterday and to-day—he has not been here, and I understand from Monna Giulia that this is by your own desire.

PANTHASILEA: Naturally. It was not possible for me to have Valentino seized whilst his escort was at my door.

[SINIBALDI *is momentarily nonplussed.*

PANTHASILEA: A cup of wine, Lord Prince?

SINIBALDI (*starting out of his brooding*): Wine? No. No wine, I thank you. Madonna, I do not understand.

PANTHASILEA: So you presume to question. I shall be glad to know your right.

SINIBALDI: No, no. I am not here to question, but to warn. And now, it seems, I am too late.

PANTHASILEA: To warn, do you say?

SINIBALDI: I have just received word from a sure source that the final assault upon Solignola will be delivered at any moment now.

[*There is a movement of dismay from* PANTHASILEA. *She stands stricken and bemused whilst* SINIBALDI *continues*:

SINIBALDI: Once that is done, Valentino will depart for Rome, and there is an end to this fine opportunity.

PANTHASILEA (*commanding herself*): True. But why assume that already it is too late?

SINIBALDI: If already Valentino should have paid you his last visit . . .

PANTHASILEA: He has not. He will be here soon.

SINIBALDI (*startled*): Eh?

PANTHASILEA: I expect him at the second hour of night.

SINIBALDI (*amazed*): What? You have given him an assignation? Here?

PANTHASILEA: How else was it to be contrived? Now you understand why I bade him visit me no more, on the ground that his escort waiting in the street was destructive of my reputation.

SINIBALDI: Yes, yes! And so?

PANTHASILEA: And so, desiring neither to render me a subject for scandal, nor yet to forgo his visits, he did as I expected—he begged the key of the garden gate that he might come in secret and alone.

SINIBALDI: By Heaven! But that was shrewdly played, madonna!

[PANTHASILEA *turns to* GIULIA.

PANTHASILEA: Bid them send Santafiora to me here at once.

[GIULIA *nods, and goes out.*

PANTHASILEA: I am glad your excellency approves me.

SINIBALDI: Approve you? I am lost in wonder. You . . . you have no doubt. . . . You . . . are sure that he will come?

PANTHASILEA: Oh, yes. He came last night; and he will come again.

SINIBALDI: He came last night, do you say?

PANTHASILEA: I said so. Yes. (*Half defiantly.*)

SINIBALDI (*between amazement and anger*): He came last night, and you allowed him to depart again?

[*She is silent, hanging her head a little. His indignation rises, fanned by suspicion.*

SINIBALDI: What does it mean? Can that squeamish fool Gianluca have been pestering you again?

PANTHASILEA: Gianluca? Gianluca is sulking. I have not seen him since I dismissed him a week ago.

SINIBALDI: But then . . . ?

PANTHASILEA (*a little lamely*): My preparations were not quite complete. I . . . I could not risk a failure.

SINIBALDI (*anxiously*): And to-night?

PANTHASILEA: All is ready.

SINIBALDI: If you need help . . .

PANTHASILEA: I have men enough. Besides, he trusts me so completely; he is so utterly without suspicion. . . .

SINIBALDI: You are sure? You are quite sure?

PANTHASILEA: Would he come in secret and alone if he were not?

SINIBALDI: No. I suppose not. And yet . . . he is subtle as all the fiends.

PANTHASILEA: This time his subtleties are blunted. (*She stifles a sigh.*) Before morning he will be on his way to Siena, a helpless captive.

SINIBALDI: Eh? I marvel that you will still trouble to send him to Siena.

PANTHASILEA: Is not that what was concerted?

SINIBALDI: Yes; but at a time when there was no thought for such circumstances as you have so cleverly contrived. This alters everything. He comes in secret and alone—in secret and alone! When he fails to return, none will know what has become of him. None will even know whether he is alive or dead. He will have vanished, leaving no trace. Why trouble, then, to send him to Siena?

PANTHASILEA: What else?

SINIBALDI: What else? Is it not plain?

[*He ceases abruptly as the door opens.*

[SANTAFIORA *comes in. He is armed and wears a peaked cap of steel.*

SANTAFIORA: You sent for me, madonna. (*He perceives Sinibaldi, and bows formally.*) Lord Prince.

[SINIBALDI *returns the bow.*

PANTHASILEA: Ah, Santafiora! Is all ready?

SANTAFIORA: Whenever your ladyship pleases. The moment this fish is safely in I can cast the net. It will be better to take him as he leaves. It would be best of all in here. . .

PANTHASILEA (*shrinking*): No, no!

[SANTAFIORA *shrugs and bows his acquiescence. She continues.*

PANTHASILEA: At least not if it can be avoided. Post your men in the garden. Await him there—unless I should meanwhile call you.

SANTAFIORA: Very well, madonna. I shall be near at hand.

PANTHASILEA: And you will remember that he is to be taken alive?

SANTAFIORA: Of course. But this duke is a man of his hands. He has the strength of any other three.

PANTHASILEA: That is why there are six of you to do this thing.

SANTAFIORA: True. But if he gives trouble, if he should kill a man or two before we make him fast, I cannot answer for the temper of my fellows.

SINIBALDI: Of course not.

PANTHASILEA: I tell you, Santafiora, he must be taken alive. Alive he is worth a thousand times as much as dead. You understand?

SANTAFIORA: Madonna, you may depend upon me to deliver him to you—alive if possible.

SINIBALDI: I will pray Heaven that it may not be possible. Thus, considering what a man is Valentino, believe me it will prove best in the end.

PANTHASILEA (*faintly scornful*): For Venice, no doubt; but not for Solignola.

[GIULIA *comes in by the double doors.*

[PANTHASILEA *turns to her questioning.*

GIULIA: Madonna, it is close upon the second hour of night. I thought his excellency . . .

SINIBALDI (*starting*): You are right, by Heaven!

[*He turns to take his leave of* PANTHASILEA, *but she has swung to* SANTAFIORA.

PANTHASILEA: To your post, Santafiora! Away with you!

SANTAFIORA: I go, madonna.

[*He bows and goes towards the door.*

PANTHASILEA: And you too, Lord Prince. You were best away.

[SANTAFIORA *pauses at the door, waiting for* SINIBALDI.

SINIBALDI: Madonna, I take my leave, rejoicing. When it is done send me word.

[*He takes her hand, and bears it to his lips.*

[*She stands as if frozen.*

[*He considers her an instant in silence, then speaks his sudden doubt.*

SINIBALDI: You . . . you are not afraid?

PANTHASILEA: Afraid? Santafiora is waiting, Lord Prince.

[*He accepts the rebuke, and bows.*

[*She inclines her head in response, and crosses to the settle, whilst* SINIBALDI *goes out with* SANTAFIORA.

PANTHASILEA: Shut out that dismal moonlight, Giulia. —But do not latch the window.

[GIULIA *goes up, closes the middle window, and draws the curtains across all three.* PANTHASILEA, *meanwhile dejectedly seats herself, staring into the fire.*

[*Having drawn the curtains,* GIULIA *comes down behind* PANTHASILEA *and stands considering her a moment.*

GIULIA (*fondly*): Madonna!

[PANTHASILEA *looks up at her, and attempts to smile her gratitude for this solicitude. She raises a hand to pat* GIULIA'S. GIULIA *takes it in both her own.*

GIULIA: How cold you are!

PANTHASILEA: Cold—ay! Cold and sick. I begin to see that Gianluca was right; that this is a loathly Judas-trick.

GIULIA: It was a Judas-trick that lured Pietro Varano to his end.

PANTHASILEA (*stiffening*): I know. That is what I tell myself when I feel my courage melting. Because of that I shall carry this thing through. But I think I shall hate myself for ever after.

GIULIA: Yet many will love and bless you for it, madonna. Dwell on that.

PANTHASILEA: O God, help me! All that I can dwell on is his trust in me. He comes here so confidingly, so full of tender homage, so unsuspicious of the knife to which he bares his throat.

GIULIA: How often has he not lured others so?

PANTHASILEA: Do you know that sometimes I ask myself if that be true? When he talks, when he tells me of his dreams and aims, when he reveals the vileness of those upon whom he has made war, I begin to doubt the evil that is said of him by such men as . . . Sinibaldi. (*Scornfully.*) Sinibaldi! A creature steeped in treachery, sly, faithless, cruel, cynically using us, as he uses all men, to his own ends.

GIULIA: But surely, madonna, it is too well known that this Duke Valentino . . .

PANTHASILEA: Because a thing is well known, it does not follow that it is true. Consider, Giulia. We were led to believe this duke an odious monster. From what is said of him we had looked to find some horror of a man, malformed, prematurely aged and ravaged by disease and the wrath of Heaven. Instead . . . (*She shrugs and makes a little gesture of scorn and helplessness.*)

GIULIA (*sighing*): Ah yes! He is beautiful. No woman could deny that. But his beauty is from the devil. He is wicked and cruel, and he prevails by evil arts.

PANTHASILEA: Pshaw!

GIULIA: Do not sneer, madonna. Take heed, lest he bewitch you.

[*Two strokes of a deep-toned bell.*

[PANTHASILEA *starts.*

PANTHASILEA: It is the second hour of night. Soon he will be here. Leave me, Giulia.

GIULIA: Remember Pietro Varano, dear madonna. Remember Solignola, which depends upon you, and which will be lost if you should weaken.

PANTHASILEA: Weaken? Why, what matter now even if I should? Once he is here, the matter is accomplished. Sh! I hear his step.

[*She rises, and with* GIULIA *turns to face the curtained windows. A moment they wait. Then the curtain masking the middle window is swept aside, and* VALENTINOIS *surges on the threshold. An instant he stands there raking the room with his glance.*

[*Wrapped in a hooded black cloak, he is in silhouette against the moonlight flooding the terrace behind him. Then he heaves a sigh that may be of satisfaction, and closes the window, but leaves the curtain drawn aside.*

[*He comes down, and at the foot of the steps lets his long mantle slip from his shoulders, emerging in close-fitting scarlet relieved only by a golden girdle from which hang dagger and purse.*

[GIULIA *cries out at the first sight of his cloaked and hooded figure. Having cast his cloak, he advances, speaking.*

VALENTINOIS: Why, Monna Giulia, do I affright you? Did you but know . . . it is myself who come in fear.

PANTHASILEA (*her voice strained*) : In fear, my lord ?

VALENTINOIS (*advancing towards her*) : How else are you to be approached, madonna, but in fear ?

PANTHASILEA (*dissembling her uneasiness*) : In fear of what ?

VALENTINOIS : Of loss of liberty.

[*She starts.*

VALENTINOIS : For what man can account himself free who has met your glance ? What man can be other than a slave thereafter ? . . . You laugh !

PANTHASILEA (*breathing again*) : My lord, as a courtier, you outshine even the great soldier that you are.

VALENTINOIS : Whatever I may be elsewhere, madonna, here at your feet a courtier's part contents me.

PANTHASILEA : Highness ! Too much honour !

[*She moves towards the table.*

PANTHASILEA : You may leave us, Giulia.

[GIULIA *curtsies in leave-taking, and goes out. At the door she pauses a moment, looking back upon them almost in fear. Meanwhile,* PANTHASILEA *at the table is taking up the beaker, and addressing* VALENTINOIS *anew.*

PANTHASILEA : A cup of wine, my lord ?

[*She pours for him. He advances to take the cup.*

VALENTINOIS : With all my heart.

[*He takes the glass and raises it towards his lips, but checks midway. His eyes narrow, and grow keen as they regard her. She is about to fill a second glass, when he stays her, covering it with his hand. She looks up at him in surprise. His countenance is again smiling and normal. Leaning towards her, he proffers his own glass.*

VALENTINOIS: One cup for us twain, I do beseech it, lady, humbly conscious of my unworthiness. (*On a sudden muted note of passion.*) Pledge me, then, and leave the wine the richer by the fragrance of your lips.

PANTHASILEA (*drawing back, as if to refuse*): My lord!

VALENTINOIS: Nay, now, I insist.

PANTHASILEA: You insist?

[*As she stares at him, a smile of understanding slowly breaks upon her face. Without another word, she drinks half the contents of the glass, then hands it to him.*

[*He takes it, heaving a sigh of satisfaction. As he drinks she speaks.*

PANTHASILEA: You are content, I trust.

VALENTINOIS (*smiling, as he sets down the cup*): I see you understand. Forgive the unworthy doubt. I should have known that one so lovely, one in whose eyes honour and truth shine so brightly and clearly, must be incapable of treachery or baseness. But I have walked so long amid snares, that mistrust of wine and steel is become an instinct. Forgive.

[*She forces a light laugh, as she replies.*

PANTHASILEA: Nay, my lord. I am honoured that you should appoint me to the exalted office of venom-taster in your household.

VALENTINOIS: I accept the rebuke. It is deserved, alas! My instinct conquered reason, which should have assured me that here, at least, I have nothing to fear.

[*He is standing before her now, his back to the uncurtained window, which she faces.*

[*The figure of a man in a peaked steel cap like that worn by* SANTAFIORA *is silhouetted for a moment against it by the moonlight. Catching sight of it, she shrinks a little. The figure passes, and disappears. He has not observed it.*

VALENTINOIS: Why do you shrink? And how cold you are!

PANTHASILEA (*her voice trembling a little*): It is very chill. The wind is in the north.

VALENTINOIS: Come nearer to the fire, my Bianca.

[*Holding her hands in his own left, he slips his right arm round her waist to conduct her. She makes a half-protest.*

PANTHASILEA: My lord! . . .

VALENTINOIS: Would you play the north wind to me? Would you use me coldly on this my last evening with you?

PANTHASILEA (*with a catch in her voice*): Your last evening!

VALENTINOIS: Of course you do not know. Come, I will tell you.

[*She allows him to conduct her to the fire. He sinks to the settle, his back to the window. She remains standing before him, facing the window and him.*

[*The silhouette returns. Having reached mid-window, it halts there; the peaked steel headpiece, such as that worn by* SANTAFIORA, *is discernible in the outline.*

[*She watches it in terror lest* VALENTINOIS *should turn and also see it.*

VALENTINOIS: Though I be Duke of Valentinois, and Lord of Life and Death throughout Romagna, yet I am the slave of harsh necessity. Duty and work command me. At dawn I must answer to the summons.

[*The silhouette moves again, crossing slowly to the left, and vanishing. Her eyes never quit it. The moment it has disappeared, she leaves him, and goes quickly up towards the window. Surprised, he follows her with his glance.*

VALENTINOIS: Why? What is it, Bianca?

[*She drags the heavy curtain across the window.*

[*He starts up in a belated attempt to do the service.*

PANTHASILEA: Thus we shall be more private.

[*She returns towards him.*

PANTHASILEA: You were saying, my lord?

VALENTINOIS: I don't believe you heard a word of it, or you would have spared yourself that trouble. You would have known that I have not long to stay.

PANTHASILEA: But why, my lord?

VALENTINOIS: Because at dawn we deliver the final assault, which is to carry Solignola.

[*He sits again. She remains standing, as before.*

PANTHASILEA: You . . . you are certain that it will be final?

VALENTINOIS: In this life there are few things of which we can be certain. But that I shall ride as a conqueror to-morrow into Solignola is one of those few things.

PANTHASILEA: My lord, it is unlucky to be over-confident.

VALENTINOIS: Unless justified by every calculable circumstance.

PANTHASILEA: There is always the incalculable.

VALENTINOIS: Not here. Here all is soundly planned, and . . . (*He breaks off, as if hesitating. Then resumes.*) Why should I not tell you? Are you not my friend? My one true and loyal friend in a land that swarms with enemies and betrayers? Are you not, Bianca?

PANTHASILEA: Indeed, my lord.

VALENTINOIS (*heaving a sigh of content*): I do love to hear you protest it! It warms me like wine. Listen, then: There is here in Assisi a plot—a shrewd and well-laid plot—to destroy me.

PANTHASILEA (*shrilly*): My lord!

VALENTINOIS: Nay, do not start. It is no new thing. For years now I have walked constantly in the shadow of death and betrayal. Custom has robbed them of their terrors for me. They charge the air I breathe with a stimulus that makes me strong. Without them I might grow soft, and languish. Well, then, this plot: It was hatched in Solignola by the Speranzoni, and so confident are they of its success . . . Nay, do not tremble, child! There is no real cause for alarm.—They are so confident of its success, so drugged and lulled by this confidence, that they have kept a negligent watch up there at Solignola. Thus we have been able to mine the Southern wall at a spot where a week ago I spied out a weakness. They have offered us no hindrance, with the result that our operations are complete. At dawn we fire the mine, and enter through the breach. The Speranzoni meet the fate of those who lean on treachery.

[*A silence.*

PANTHASILEA: But it still wants some hours to dawn. Betwixt this and then, much may betide.

VALENTINOIS: But nothing that is outside my calculations.

PANTHASILEA: How can you be so sure?

VALENTINOIS: Why! What do you fear for me, gentle lady?

PANTHASILEA: You spoke of a plot—a shrewd and well-laid plot to destroy you.

VALENTINOIS: How sweet is this concern! I vow you are trembling. Oh, dismiss your every fear. With the strength of the bull that is the emblem of my house, I combine the cunning of the fox. There have been more plots against my life, I do believe, than against the life of any man since Adam. Where are the plotters now? Mostly dead of the death they had prepared for me. They have my pity, poor deluded fools! My pity and my prayers. God rest their evil, foolish souls!

PANTHASILEA: But this present plot may not be like those others. This time the plotters may prevail. And if they did. . . .

VALENTINOIS: Pooh! Why have they not yet struck? Because opportunity has been denied them. And now it is too late.

PANTHASILEA: Too late? You are sure?

VALENTINOIS: I am sure. None knows of my presence here to-night save you and Monna Giulia.

PANTHASILEA: We . . . we might be in the plot.

VALENTINOIS (*laughing*): Dear saint! If I were capable, without good reason, of suspecting you of any vileness, why, then I should be unworthy to sit beside you here.

PANTHASILEA: Yet just now you suspected my wine.

VALENTINOIS: Am I not forgiven an offence that was born of habit? Besides, to prepare the wine there were other hands than yours. (*Taking one of her hands.*) These gentle hands that could never dispense anything but charity and good.

PANTHASILEA (*withdrawing her hand, shrinking*): My lord! My lord!

VALENTINOIS: Why? What now? Almost you seem afraid.

PANTHASILEA: I am.

VALENTINOIS: You are? Of me? Ah, surely, not of me?

[*She is silent.*

VALENTINOIS: What cause can I have given? (*Passionately.*) I come in lowliest homage, to feast my soul on your dear presence, as the devout feast upon the contemplation of eternal bliss. Do you not tell yourself what joy and consolation it has been to me to find here

a blessed haven, a sanctuary where falsehood and evil have no room, where, secure from peril, I may for a brief fleeting hour forget the world and turbulent ambition? Do not those feminine intuitions, said to be never failing, tell you that this Cesare Borgia, regarded in Italy as a dread conqueror, is here a slave—your creature, to do with as you will? Ha! If those who hate me had but won you to their service, in what a trap might I not now be caught?

PANTHASILEA (*trembling*): Why . . . O why do men hate you so?

VALENTINOIS: Why? Hate, madonna, is the first-born of fear, and I have made men fear me.

PANTHASILEA: If I were a man and had your power, lord duke, I should prefer to make men love me.

VALENTINOIS: And how would you win the love of such creatures as those upon whom it is my duty to make war? Can you name one amongst them who deserves love, respect, or even mercy, at my hands?

PANTHASILEA: Some you have slain who did no more—so it is said—than defend their right.

VALENTINOIS: "So it is said." That introduces every tale of my misdeeds. Whom have you heard named?

PANTHASILEA: More than one, I think.

VALENTINOIS (*frowning*): Eh? Their names, madonna!

PANTHASILEA: There . . . there was Oliverotto, Lord of Fermo.

VALENTINOIS: A brigand who butchered his own uncle that he might usurp his place, and who would have sold me to the Orsini faction. Should I have pitied such a scoundrel?

PANTHASILEA: You cannot say the same of the Varano.

VALENTINOIS: Did I slay old Giulio? Nay, now . . .

PANTHASILEA: But you slew his son, Pietro . . . Pietro Varano.

[*She speaks the name between tenderness and ferocity, her face averted from him.*

[*He eyes her a moment with narrowing glance. Faintly, understandingly, he smiles. Then he speaks, slowly, grimly.*

VALENTINOIS: Pietro Varano! Yes! What do you know of him?

PANTHASILEA: I . . . ? What should I know? No more than what is said.

VALENTINOIS: Not all of that, I hope. For there are things said of him—and they are true—of which such purity as yours were best in ignorance. You never heard perhaps how he treacherously poisoned Paolo degli Uberti because he coveted Uberti's wife?

[*She wheels upon him suddenly, quivering with anger, her voice shrill.*

PANTHASILEA: Do you say that of Pietro Varano? It is false! A wicked, evil lie!

VALENTINOIS: It does credit to your charity that you should so believe it. But it is true, none the less. Pietro Varano was like that—an evil devil in an angel's shape.

PANTHASILEA: O God! It can't be true! It can't!

VALENTINOIS: You are oddly moved. Does it happen, after all, that you knew this fellow Varano?

PANTHASILEA: I did. I knew him well, and honoured him.

VALENTINOIS: Alas! For what I say is true. I had the tale from the lips of Uberti when he lay dying. He was a condottiero in my service, and my friend. I swore to

him that I would see justice done; and when Camerino fell, I did not forget. I never do. I always pay—as you'll discover when you know me better.

Varano was like all these petty tyrants whom I have expunged—from Imola, Faenza, Pesaro, Rimini and the rest—a faithless steward. He was of those set to rule in Romagna as Vicars of the Holy See. Instead, abusing their trusts, they have ground the people to their own profit; grown arrogant, they have rebelled against the authority of their overlord, the Pope, from whom they hold their fiefs, and fallen to brigand warfare among themselves. They have soaked the soil of this Romagna in blood. Because I drove them out I am hated. But by whom? Is it by the people of this Romagna? Nay. They hail me as a deliverer. My best troops are Romagna men, who come flocking to my banner, eager to throw off the yoke of their oppressors.

The men who hate me are the glutted tyrants I have deposed, and the rulers of the great Italian States of Venice, Milan and Naples who jealously dread my consolidation of this dismembered Romagna into one great power that shall be the equal of themselves. Oh, and there is more than that. Venice—covetous, peddling Venice, had looked with eyes of greed upon the Romagna seaports. That greed I have frustrated. And now Venetian spite vents itself in calumnies of me and mine that are spreading over Europe with the rank luxuriance of all evil growths. There is no crime that is not now attributed to us, no vice so foul but that it is our daily habit, no evil lust by which we are not obsessed. The least that is said of me is that I am a murderer, that the poison cup and the dagger are my tools.

To-day I hear from Rome that the Cardinal Orsini has died in the castle of Sant' Angelo, where he was imprisoned because he had conspired against my house, and already the rumour runs that he was poisoned by my father. And the rumours of to-day are the history of

to-morrow. There is no evidence, but what matter that? All the world knows that it is impossible for an old man of seventy to die a natural death.

But if we had desired his death should we have poisoned him in secret? When I strike, I strike openly, that others may beware and tremble—and justly, always justly.

In Rome there was a scribbler hired by Venice to defame us. He published a pasquinade in which he represented me and mine as monsters of infamy. Among the crimes with which he charged me was the murder of my own brother Gandia, for reasons so grotesquely horrible that I will not offend your ears with the recital of them.

I had him taken. But do you think I killed him?

PANTHASILEA: None could have blamed you. What . . . what did you do?

VALENTINOIS: I let him go.

PANTHASILEA: You let him go?

VALENTINOIS: All but his tongue and his right hand. Those I kept that he might never utter or write another slander.

And so, Bianca, when you hear the evil that is so freely spoken of Valentino, bethink you that evil may have provoked the deeds with which he is charged.

If I have dwelt on these things in this last of the precious hours we have spent together, it is that hereafter you may judge me with that strict justice in which, myself, I deal.

[*A pause.*

[*Throughout his apologia, her interest, faint at first, has gradually grown more and more keen. Now that he has done she sits very pensive.*

You are silent, my Bianca! Is it that I have failed to convince you? Is it that you prefer the voice of slander to my own? Do you doubt the truth of what I have told you?

PANTHASILEA: I do not. I would I could. But you have magic arts of conviction when you talk.

VALENTINOIS: You would that you could? Why so?

PANTHASILEA (*confused*): My lord, I do not know what I am saying. I am bewildered by your tale. It is at war with all that I have ever heard of you, and yet (*impulsively*) God knows it agrees with what I have come to think for myself during these days.

VALENTINOIS: Happy days! Happier in that case than I had even dreamed them!

PANTHASILEA: Tell me this, my lord. . . . What—what fate do you reserve to-morrow for Count Guido degli Speranzoni!

VALENTINOIS (*He sighs. He seems beset by doubt, by weakness*): That is the question that is troubling me. Count Guido, I know, is but the catspaw of scheming Venice. It is Venice that has stiffened him into this resistance. And I should be unjust if I visited the consequences too heavily upon him. When I shall have reduced him to obedience, it shall be his to continue Lord of Solignola, if he will frankly recognize his stewardship and discharge its obligations.

PANTHASILEA: Now am I indeed convinced. I see at last how I have been misled. . . .

VALENTINOIS: Misled?

PANTHASILEA (*recollecting herself*): In the opinions I had formed.

VALENTINOIS: Who could blame you? It is not often I am at such pains to reveal myself as I have been to-night.

PANTHASILEA: Why? Why is this?

VALENTINOIS: Need you ask, Bianca? Does not the act explain itself? Can you doubt the motive that urges me to stand well in your dear eyes?

PANTHASILEA: These are but words! (*She utters a little laugh, half bitter.*) Will you ever think again, I wonder, when you pass on to further conquests, of poor Bianca Bracci in her loneliness?

VALENTINOIS (*faintly sardonic*): At Spoleto?

PANTHASILEA: At . . . at Spoleto. Where else?

[*He leans towards her, staring into her eyes until she draws back, shrinking, as if in fear. He rises, and moves to the hearth. There, after a moment, he turns, facing her again, and considering her obvious agitation. Then he speaks softly, his arms thrown out towards her.*

VALENTINOIS: Shall I come back to you, my Bianca? Shall I seek you at Spoleto? Would you have it so?

[*His glance envelops and holds her own, fascinating her.*

VALENTINOIS: Speak! Answer me, Bianca. My destiny, all my life, is in your hands at this moment.

[*The double meaning of the phrase arrests her, terrifies her. Suddenly she begins to weep. She speaks brokenly.*

PANTHASILEA: My lord! My lord!

[*As if compelled and drawn by his glance, she rises, confronting him. He opens his arms.*

VALENTINOIS: Bianca! Come!

PANTHASILEA (*battling against the magnetism of his personality*): Ah, no! no!

[*She hides her face in her hands. He steps forward, and takes her by the shoulders.*

VALENTINOIS: Bianca!

PANTHASILEA (*piteously, seeking justification for a surrender to which she is compelled*): Say . . . say that you love me!

VALENTINOIS (*laughing softly*) : That is a bombardment with which any clown may win a citadel. I ask a free capitulation.

[*He takes her in his arms. She falls to shuddering and sobbing against his breast. Over her head, his eyes look straight ahead into nothingness. They are invested with the mockery inseparable from knowledge. Then he stoops to kiss her—long and passionately. Thereafter, he gently disengages her arms from his neck, and steps away from her.*

VALENTINOIS : And now, farewell ! I leave my soul with you.

[*She starts in terror, remembering the men who wait for him in the garden. She clings to him fearfully, her voice trembling.*

PANTHASILEA : Ah, no, no ! You shall not go !

VALENTINOIS (*in surprise*) : Why ? What is this ?

PANTHASILEA (*panting*) : Ah, not yet. . . . My lord, do not leave me yet !

VALENTINOIS : Would you tempt me from my duty ? You know the work awaiting me.

PANTHASILEA : Yes, yes . . . I know. But . . . I know not when I shall see you next. You ride at dawn. Valentino !

[*Still clutching the long sleeve of his doublet, she sinks down, half collapsing upon the settle.*

VALENTINOIS : Sweet temptress !

PANTHASILEA : There is something . . . something I must say to you before you go.

VALENTINOIS : You make resistance very hard. But it grows late, and I have much to do.

PANTHASILEA : Ah, not yet. Do not go yet ! I am full of dreadful premonitions. You say there is a plot to destroy you. What . . . what if assassins should be lurking out there now, waiting for you ?

VALENTINOIS: How is that possible? None knows that I am here.

PANTHASILEA: You . . . you may have been spied upon, and followed. Oh, my dear lord, do not go hence just yet. Here—in here with me—at least you are safe. Do not leave me racked by fear for you. . . .

VALENTINOIS: Sweet persuader!

[*He kisses her again, and moves towards window. She bars his way.*

PANTHASILEA (*desperately*): I can't let you go! I can't

VALENTINOIS: You can't? Why?

PANTHASILEA: Because . . . (*She checks, shrinking from giving the true reason. Then pleads desperately.*) Give me an hour, Valentino . . . just one little hour.

[*Looking at her, he slowly yields.*

VALENTINOIS: You turn my will to water. Let ambition go hang! I am but mortal man. Though Solignola should go unconquered for to-morrow, here I stay since you so bid me. (*He takes her in his arms.*)

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS

[*It remains lowered for half a minute to mark the passing of time.*

THE CURTAIN RISES AGAIN

[*The stage is now in darkness, save only for the glow of the fire and a beam of light from the open doorway of Panthasilea's room.* VALENTINOIS *enters thence, and crossing to the hearth, takes up a taper and lights the extinguished candles on the overmantel. As he does so* PANTHASILEA, *a loose robe about her, appears in the doorway.*

[*He crosses to her. She clings to him.*

VALENTINOIS: The hour is sped—and more.

PANTHASILEA: And in its speeding, it has altered the whole world for you and me.

[*He leads her across to the settle.*

VALENTINOIS: It is time for me to go.

PANTHASILEA (*wildly*): Not yet! You must not leave me yet! How can you leave me, now?

VALENTINOIS: Alas! I must! It is nigh on midnight, and . . .

PANTHASILEA (*interrupting, passionately pleading*): You love me? Say that you love me, Valentino. You have not said it yet.

VALENTINOIS: Does it still need words?

PANTHASILEA: It does, it does. I must be very sure of it. Oh, Valentino! (*Suddenly, overwrought, she falls to weeping.*)

VALENTINOIS: Why do you weep, Bianca?

PANTHASILEA: Oh, I am vile! Vile!

VALENTINOIS: What are you saying?

PANTHASILEA: It is time that you knew.

[*She speaks in a strained voice. It is obvious that she preserves her self-control only by an effort.*

PANTHASILEA: Awhile ago, if you had listened, you might have heard steps out there.

VALENTINOIS (*calmly*): I did. I heard the gravel crunching in the garden.

PANTHASILEA: You heard! Those were the footsteps of assassins, brought here by my contriving.

[*He does not move. Calmly he continues to regard her, smiling a little. She stares at him a moment, amazed by his calm. Then she interprets it in her own way.*

PANTHASILEA: You cannot believe it of me! You think I jest. No, you think I am testing your affection for me. But it is true, I tell you—true! I . . . I was sent hither to lure you into a trap that you may be held as a hostage for the safety of Solignola. I . . . I am the centre of the plot, of this plot to destroy you which you suspected.

[*He continues calmly to regard her, maintaining his faint smile. Slowly he shakes his head. He speaks, on a note of incredulity.*

VALENTINOIS: You! You, Bianca! The lovely spider in this unclean web! Pshaw! But if this were so, why should you tell me now?

PANTHASILEA: Why? Why? Don't you . . . don't you see?

VALENTINOIS: Unless you mean that because I am now in the trap, your telling cannot matter. . . . I do not understand.

PANTHASILEA: I tell you because I love you. You have made me love you, Valentino—until I must break faith with those who trust me—betray them all. Love has defeated me. I can no longer do this vile thing I came to do.

VALENTINOIS: I see.

PANTHASILEA (*stricken by his unalterable calm*): You see? You see?

[*He looks at her a moment, still smiling and enigmatic. Then he takes up his hat and cloak, and without a word, followed by her startled glance, he crosses and goes up to the window by which he entered. His hand is upon the curtain, when she speaks, crying out.*

PANTHASILEA: You do not believe me!

VALENTINOIS (*turning*): Yes. I believe you.

PANTHASILEA: You believe me! But then . . . ? Have you nothing to say ?

VALENTINOIS: What can be said to a traitress who makes, as you have confessed, a snare of her own charms ?

PANTHASILEA (*stung*): Oh-h ! And your contempt—in spite of all that lies between us—will suffer you to say no more than that ?

VALENTINOIS: No more ! (*He turns to go.*)

PANTHASILEA (*suddenly fierce*): Take care ! My men still wait. You are walking to your death—for death it will be at a word from me.

VALENTINOIS: Why, what a thing do you conceive me, that I am to be blown this way and that by every gusty emotion you display. You think to stir me to love, to pity, to contempt, and now to fear—and all at your good pleasure !

PANTHASILEA (*in mounting anger*): Have you only scorn and mockery for my love and pity ?

VALENTINOIS: Pity ? And shall Cesare Borgia owe his life to your compassion ?

PANTHASILEA: You may owe death to your own arrogance, if I but speak the word.

VALENTINOIS: Speak it, then. I urge you. Give the signal.

PANTHASILEA (*furiously*): You will have it so ! Why, then . . . (*Shouting, and beating her hands together.*) Ho, there ! To me ! Santafiora !

[*As she calls,* VALENTINOIS, *with a laugh, sweeps aside the curtain.*

VALENTINOIS: Let me admit them for you.

[*He pushes open the windows, then recoils a little. On the terrace are dimly visible four men in steel caps.* PANTHASILEA *advances a step, crying out shrilly.*

PANTHASILEA: No! No! Wait! Santafiora! No violence—in God's name! . . . Ah!

[*She ends on a scream, as the men come forward into the light where she can see them.*

[*Their leader is not Santafiora, but* RAMIREZ, *and on the breasts of the other three is displayed the bull escutcheon that is the livery of the House of Borgia.*

[RAMIREZ *bows and speaks to* VALENTINOIS.

RAMIREZ: My lord, your orders are fulfilled. We have seized all those who were lurking in the garden. There were six of them. They are fast bound, awaiting your pleasure.

VALENTINOIS: You have done well, Ramirez. You have leave to go.

[RAMIREZ *retires, but remains in view at the back of the terrace with his men.*

[VALENTINOIS *looks at* PANTHASILEA, *he smiles a little, between mockery and wistfulness. Leaning against the settle for support, she stares back at him wide-eyed. She speaks in a voice of horrified amazement.*

PANTHASILEA: You knew! You knew!

VALENTINOIS: From the hour I met you, Panthasilea degli Speranzoni.

PANTHASILEA: That, too!

VALENTINOIS: That, too.

PANTHASILEA (*in torturing bewilderment, weakly*): Then . . . then . . . Why . . . ?

VALENTINOIS: I left you free so that you might fool the defenders of Solignola with your daily letters, until we completed the mine that is to be fired at dawn.

PANTHASILEA: And for that . . . for that you . . .

VALENTINOIS: For that and something more. (*Suddenly exultant.*) The lust of Conquest! I accepted this duel against you and your woman's arts; and your confession

when it came should be the admission that I was conqueror in your heart and soul as I am conqueror elsewhere, as I shall sit a conqueror to-morrow in Solignola.

[*He sweeps her a bow, and goes up.*

PANTHASILEA (*in a strangled voice*): Solignola! Oh, God! What is left for me now?

VALENTINOIS (*pausing on the threshold of the window*): For you? Lady, I leave you the memories of this hour.

[*With a long-drawn, shuddering sob, she sinks down on the settle, and crouches there under the load of her shameful understanding.*

[*From the threshold,* VALENTINOIS *regards her for a moment, his face calm and expressionless. Then he passes out.*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

ACT IV

A Hall in the Castle of Solignola. (*As Act I.*)

It is evening of the following day. In the sky, seen beyond the loggia, an orange glow of sunset pales gradually to lemon as the scene proceeds. This fades out thereafter during the act to palest turquoise and then begins to deepen, first to purple, then to sapphire blue, with the onset of night.

The scene is that of the first act. But the upper part of the stage is now furnished by a large dais upon which a banqueting table is set. At the middle place on the upper side of this there is a large, gilded armchair, flanked by two stools on either side; in addition an armchair is set at each end of the table. A lantern, on a tall pedestal, stands at each upper end of the dais, and there are two leather cushions on the dais in front of the table.

At rise of curtain MICHELETTO DA CORELLA *is standing in the loggia, attended by a* PAGE. CORELLA *is in armour, stained and dusty. He has put off his helmet, and his head is cased in a velvet skull-cap.* TWO LACKEYS *are in the act of completing the furnishings of the banqueting-table, which consists of a platter, goblet and knife and spoon at each place, all gilded and decorated; of dishes of fruit, and tall, decorative wine jugs. A large, beautifully wrought cup of gold is in the middle place, where the great chair is set.*

The main doors are open. On the parapet outside TWO SWISS, *under the direction of* FERRANTE, *are hauling down the standard of the Speranzoni from the castle flag-staff. They tear it from the halyard and replace it by the banner of Cesare Borgia, which they proceed to hoist.*

A carillon of joy-bells—begun before the rise of the curtain—crashes out in fullest volume as the flag soars aloft. With this comes now a burst of cheering from the courtyard below. Gradually thereafter the bells diminish, and, with a half-dozen single strokes, cease altogether.

The Two Lackeys, *having completed the furnishing of the table, now withdraw by the small door down right.*

Corella: Thank heaven that's over! If there's a din I hate, boy, it's the ding-dong of church bells.

Page: But when they are joy-bells—and rung for victory.

Corella: Bells are bells, whatever they may be rung for—distracting as a scolding woman's tongue. Here, boy, help me off with my harness.

[Ramirez *enters at back. He, too, is in armour.*

Corella: Ah, Ramirez! Well come.

Ramirez: Well found, Micheletto!

[*While the talk continues now, the* Page *is assisting* Corella *to disarm—back and breast, cuissarts and brassards only, which compose the armour.*

Ramirez: So the job is really finished! And we labourers can lay aside our tools. Faith! It proved none so difficult in the end. These men of Solignola didn't show much spirit.

Corella: Spirit? We blew the spirit out of them when we fired the mine this morning. It took them too completely by surprise.

Ramirez: Still, they might have made a better show at the breach. Why, they were just driven in like sheep in panic. I had expected more of them.

Corella: The fact is, they had expected less of us. Be thankful.

Ramirez: I am. The job is done. We're here, and all is quiet. Where is the duke?

Corella: His highness is closeted with Count Guido (*He points L.*), settling the details of the terms, and not to be disturbed.

Ramirez: But I've come for orders.

CORELLA: I have them for you. You are to remain in Solignola with your troop, to furnish a bodyguard for his highness, and to escort him hence to-morrow. But you are to order Naldi and Scipione to withdraw all their men from the town and to encamp them in the valley.

RAMIREZ: Withdraw them from the town?

CORELLA: His highness will take no risk of pillage or any sort of violence. See to it, Ramirez. Let your officers remind them that if any man steals so much as a straw his neck will pay for it.

RAMIREZ: The duke is very tender of these his latest subjects.

CORELLA: That is his usual way.

[*The* SENESCHAL *comes in at back.*

CORELLA: What is it?

SENESCHAL: The Orators of the Powers are here, to felicitate his highness upon his victory.

CORELLA: Bid them in.

[*The* SENESCHAL *bows and withdraws.*

CORELLA: Be off, Ramirez. Draw up your troop in the square before the Duomo. His highness will be there presently.

RAMIREZ: I go.

[*He bows and turns to depart. As he is going, the ambassadors enter:* MACCHIAVELLI, CAPELLO, SINIBALDI (*who is livid with chagrin*), MARIANO *and* GASPARO.

CORELLA: Sirs, to command. His highness bade me announce you the moment you arrived. He will, I know, be honoured by your congratulations. If you will give me leave, I will let him know at once.

[CORELLA *goes out L., followed by the* PAGE *bearing his arms.*

CAPELLO (*falsely genial*) : There is good cause for our congratulations. These people of Solignola take their defeat in excellent part.

SINIBALDI (*sourly*) : As the mountains take rain. Because they cannot help themselves.

MACCHIAVELLI : A happy image, Lord Prince.

SINIBALDI (*mistrustful*) : Eh ?

MACCHIAVELLI : Is not the rain beneficent to the mountains ? Does it not bring fertility to their slopes ?

SINIBALDI : Maybe. But that is not what I had in mind.

CAPELLO (*hastening to explain*) : It is the passive acquiescence in their subjection that amazes the prince.

MACCHIAVELLI : But why should it ? The folk of Solignola know that their conquest by the duke is for their ultimate good ; they know his way, and that they need apprehend no danger to life or property.

SINIBALDI : What of the life and property of Count Guido, Messer Niccolò ? Will you answer for those ?

MACCHIAVELLI : As to the property, it was never really his own. Count Guido was but a Vicar of the Holy See, a feudatory of Rome.

SINIBALDI : You take that view, do you ?

MACCHIAVELLI : Does not your lordship ?

CAPELLO (*interrupting hurriedly*) : But of course, of course !

SINIBALDI : And his life then ? What of that ?

MACCHIAVELLI : A delicate matter. When a prince conquers such a State as this, he will, if he is a wise prince, do one of two things : either he will constrain the members of the vanquished family to become his friends, or else . . .

SINIBALDI : Or else ?

MACCHIAVELLI : Or else put it beyond their power to be his enemies.

SINIBALDI : That, no doubt, is the policy his highness will prefer.

MACCHIAVELLI : Dare you blame him ?

SINIBALDI : Sir, I am not so steeped in statecraft that I can find no pity for Count Guido.

MACCHIAVELLI : Pity ! That is an emotion. It has no place in policy.

SINIBALDI : It certainly has none in Valentino's.

MACCHIAVELLI : That is why he is a model prince.

[CORELLA *re-enters, and announces.*

CORELLA : Sirs, his highness !

[VALENTINOIS *and* GUIDO *come in by the door down R., following* CORELLA. VALENTINOIS *is booted to the thighs and wears a short hacketon, below which gleams the escalloped edge of a coat of mail. Over this he wears the gonfalonier's mantle as in Act II. Scene I. He is covered by a steel cap, and wears gloves, one of which he is drawing on as he enters.* COUNT GUIDO, *too, is in leather, and a steel gorget still remains upon him of his armour. His head is bandaged, and he carries his left arm in a sling. He is pale and dejected.*

[*The* ORATORS *all bow as* VALENTINOIS *advances.*

VALENTINOIS : Sirs, it honours me that you should seek me here so soon. Twice gives who quickly gives.

CAPELLO : Knowing that at dawn you set out for Rome, this was our only opportunity to present our felicitations.

VALENTINOIS : I make them very welcome, and you, sirs. But my time is short. I am awaited at the Cathedral by the Ancients of the City who are to swear fealty upon my hands. If you will give me your support and company at the ceremony I shall be honoured.

ORATORS (*They all bow, mumbling platitudes*) : Highness, the honour will be ours. It is we shall be honoured ! We could not miss the occasion.

VALENTINOIS : On our return perhaps I may have your company at supper—simple and informal, because I must retire early against to-morrow's journey. Count Guido, here, will be our host.

[*There is a movement of surprise.*

VALENTINOIS : For I rejoice to tell you that Count Guido is to continue here in Solignola as Rome's Vicar and my Vice-gerent, subject to certain conditions which have been happily agreed. Count Guido is not required to take the oath in public. He shall be privately sworn before I depart. And now, sirs, if it be your pleasure, we will proceed to the Cathedral.

[*They fall back.* CORELLA *goes ahead to the door at back. Beyond it the* SWISS *come to attention.* VALENTINOIS *bows to* COUNT GUIDO, *and goes up and out, the others following. As he appears at the head of the stairs there is a flourish of trumpets and a burst of cheering from the courtyard below. This is followed by martial music as he descends out of view, which continues some little time, but dwindling in the distance until it fades away entirely.*

[*The doors are closed by the* SWISS, *and* COUNT GUIDO *is left alone. He makes a mute gesture of despair, then crosses with dragging feet towards the chair by the hearth, into which he lets himself fall. He pulls a letter from his pocket, straining his eyes to read it* (*yet again, having read it previously*). *As he reads he groans.*

[*The door at back is softly opened. The* SWISS, *having followed* VALENTINOIS, *are no longer on guard there.*

[SINIBALDI *enters furtively.*

[*Hearing his step,* COUNT GUIDO *crushes the letter in his hand, and turns in alarm.*

GUIDO : Sinibaldi !

SINIBALDI (*in the act of closing the door*) : I gave them the slip in the courtyard. Let them go to their fawning on this bastard. You had my message ?

GUIDO : Your message ? Yes. I have it here. God's curse on you !

SINIBALDI (*aghast*) : On me ! Why . . .

GUIDO : Was it not you that set her on to this ? Was it not you who sent her to this ruin that has dragged our own at its heels.

SINIBALDI : My friend, I heed your poor bruised heart, rather than your words. Was it my fault that your daughter failed us in this fashion ? Could I foresee that this devil would beguile her so ? And to say I sent her ! It was she, herself, afire with vengeance, who insisted. Your grief makes you unjust, Lord Count.

GUIDO : I am accursed, I think ! Why—as there is God of Pity—did not the pike that broke my arm this morning tear out my heart instead ? Why did not the sword that shore my brow bite deep into this old brain ? Was I spared that I may go mad ? For what was I spared ?

SINIBALDI : My friend ! My poor friend !

GUIDO : Poor ! that is the word. A thing of pity. Count Guido degli Speranzoni, once a proud eagle on these craggy heights ; now a poor battered fowl, so tame and broken, that I am to feed from the hand of this ravisher of my power and of my honour !

SINIBALDI : Sh ! Have a care !

GUIDO (*on a musing, bitter tone, tapping the letter*) : Three hours you say he stayed alone with her last night, whilst his men made fast all those she had posted in the garden. Three hours !

SINIBALDI : And it's my belief that but for her weakness she could have taken him the night before. I have it from herself that he was there alone—alone and in secret.

GUIDO : Hell ! It seems impossible. I'd not believe it but for her lying letters, her failure and her absence now. Her lover Pietro but three months dead ! Her soul, a flame of vengeance ! And then . . . this. That is woman. Woman ! Again I ask you, why have I been spared ?

SINIBALDI : For vengeance, surely.

GUIDO : Eh ? Are you mad ?

SINIBALDI : This bolt has missed. But I've another in my armoury. We'll end where we should have begun. I was a fool ever to have yielded to this crazy plan of taking him alive.

GUIDO : Do you reproach me with that ?

SINIBALDI : If I had insisted on the direct and simple way, we should have had him stiff by now. There was ample opportunity in Assisi, and I must have seized it, but that I trusted to your crack-brained scheme.

GUIDO : God's light, man ! Do you think I have no memory ? When you came here seeking catspaws to do the work of Venice, you gave a dozen reasons why the hand of the Serene Republic should not be seen. And now we have your big talk of what you would have done but that we thwarted you !

SINIBALDI : In what I would have done the hand of Venice would never have appeared. It will not now in what is yet to do.

GUIDO : Be plain, man.

SINIBALDI : You'll take a little risk to make him cold, to avenge your ruin and your daughter's shame ?

GUIDO : A little risk ? There's no risk too big to daunt me. I am to swear fealty to him upon the Scriptures and

upon his hands, so that I may purchase a few more years of this dishonoured life. If I can avert that. . . .

SINIBALDI : Listen !

[*He looks cautiously round, and draws a little silver phial from his pocket.*

SINIBALDI : He delivers himself into our hands. This supper to which we are bidden . . . Look ! One single drop of this, rubbed round the cup from which he is to drink. . . . One drop. . . . So little that it will not show. Let him drink but half the cupful, and in less time than it will take to tell a dozen paternosters he will be journeying over Styx.

[*They look at each other in silence.*

SINIBALDI : It leaves no signs, and none will know of what he died.

GUIDO (*with sarcasm*) : Save that he died here in my house—at my table !

SINIBALDI : Do you not wish him dead ? Have you not cause enough to kill him ? Your daughter . . .

GUIDO : O cease ! Let the thing be done. What do I care so that he perishes ? What do I care that I do the work of Venice, so that I do my own ?

SINIBALDI : That's it, that's it ! Each of us achieves his ends.

GUIDO : But only one will pay. What matter ? I am past caring. There's his cup—the cup of honour—already set. Do it, and be damned !

[SINIBALDI *steps eagerly to the table, takes up the cup, and from the phial measures into it one drop.*

SINIBALDI : A lovely cup for such a draught !

[*He twirls the cup to spread the drop of liquid. He is still doing so when the door at back opens and,*

[PANTHASILEA *comes in. She is wrapped in a black, hooded cloak, her face pale and set.*

[SINIBALDI *wheels in alarm at the sound of the opening door, still holding the cup a second before he hastily puts it down.*

SINIBALDI : Madonna !

[GUIDO *turns, sees her, and utters an audible gasp of mingled anger and amazement.*

[*She comes forward, loosens and removes her cloak, under which she is darkly clad. She flings the cloak on a chair by the door. She looks at her father in mute, appealing expectancy.*

GUIDO (*starting up*) : So, you have returned at last, you drab !

PANTHASILEA (*piteously*) : Father !

GUIDO (*with a gesture of loathing*) : Never . . . never call me by that name again. I would a blight had withered me or ever I begat a harlot. O God ! the shame of it !

[PANTHASILEA *stands rigid, frozen.*

SINIBALDI : Patience, sir ! At least hear what Monna Lea has to say. Perhaps she can explain. . . .

GUIDO : Explain what ? Her presence here ? (*To Panthasilea.*) Why have you come back ? To see for yourself the ruin you have wrought ? To see your broken father dragged at the bloody wheel of this conqueror's chariot ? Or is it so that I may kill you, and thus wipe out your disgrace and mine ?

[*With his hand on his dagger, he turns as if to rush upon her.* SINIBALDI *restrains him.*

PANTHASILEA : Nay, Lord Prince ! Let be ! (*To Guido.*) Kill me if you will. Kill me and be welcome. But do it cleanly with your dagger or your hands, not foully with your tongue.

GUIDO: Why, so I will. But first, madonna, render your accounts. What did you go to do in Assisi, and what was it that you did?

PANTHASILEA: What I went to do, you know; and why I went to do it.

GUIDO: Ay; but will you tell us what you did?

PANTHASILEA: I went to save Solignola. My love for Solignola and you was one spur to drive me. The other was my hate of the murderer of Pietro Varano.

GUIDO: Yes, yes. This we know. Come to the business.

PANTHASILEA: My hate was fed on lies—on lies. I believed Pietro to be good and noble; I learnt that he was base and vile, a murderer, an adulterer—the man I was to have married, the man my virgin heart had sanctified.

GUIDO: So! They told you of the business of the Uberti!

PANTHASILEA: You knew! You—my father—and you let me go immolate myself to avenge—that!

GUIDO: Is there more of this?

PANTHASILEA: A little more. There is the other lie, the lie touching this man I was to betray into your hands. He was depicted to me as a monster in body and in soul.

GUIDO: In soul! He has no soul. He is antichrist.

PANTHASILEA: So you taught me, and so I believed, so I thought last night that I had proof—until I came to see that what I deemed his vileness was but the mirror of my own. I went to do a Judas work. I was detected. . . .

GUIDO: Detected? You mean that you betrayed us.

PANTHASILEA: Betrayed you! There was not the need. He knew; from the first he knew. He was never in my power. I was ever in his.

SINIBALDI: But, madonna, two nights ago, when he came, as you told me, you might have taken him then.

PANTHASILEA: You think so?

SINIBALDI: I have your word for it, that you had not posted your men.

PANTHASILEA: But if I had posted them, that would have happened then which happened last night instead.

GUIDO: Had he not beguiled you, the blow would have been struck a week ago, and if it missed, we could have taken other measures.

PANTHASILEA (*scornfully*): Against him? It is your vanity that blinds you, that has blinded you throughout, as it blinded those treacherous dolts at Sinigaglia, as it blinded me—poor fool!—when I went to proffer him my Judas-kiss, and stayed instead to receive the Judas-kiss from him.

[*With a growl of rage,* GUIDO *would fling himself upon her. But again* SINIBALDI *restrains him.*

SINIBALDI (*suddenly inspired*): You see how it is! She is possessed! That warlock has practised the black arts upon the girl.

GUIDO (*stricken by the explanation*): Saints of Heaven! Can you believe . . .

SINIBALDI: Can you behold her, can you hear her, and still doubt that she is bewitched?

GUIDO: Bewitched! (*Draws his dagger.*) Let me go, by Heaven! that I may exorcise her.

SINIBALDI: Nay, nay, man! A deed of violence now, and you ruin all.

[GUIDO *pauses, and curbs himself, recollecting.*

PANTHASILEA: Do not restrain him, sir. And do not deceive yourselves. He practised on me no witchery but that of his beauty, his cunning and his power.

GUIDO : You shameless drab !

SINIBALDI : How should she understand—poor victim of his spells ?

PANTHASILEA : That, yes—that and more. Say also : the wretched dupe of his loathing and his scorn, which he disguised under a glittering mask of love. O God ! Is there in all the world such another thing of shame ? Why don't you kill me, and have done ?

GUIDO : Ay !

SINIBALDI (*again restraining*) : We will do better, madonna. We will avenge you.

PANTHASILEA : Avenge me ! You ! (*Laughs.*) How will you avenge me ?

SINIBALDI : I will end now where I should have begun—do that which as lately as last night I was urging you to do.

PANTHASILEA : You will kill him—you !

SINIBALDI : I will bring about his end.

PANTHASILEA : And how will you accomplish it ? He is invulnerable. Weapons forged to slay him, turn against those that handle them.

SINIBALDI : Not this one. Impalpable, invisible, it lies in wait for him already.

GUIDO : Ay.

PANTHASILEA : You deceive yourselves to your undoing. He is empanoplied in caution, armed in cunning against all your wiles.

GUIDO : His cunning cannot turn steel or supply the antidote to poison.

PANTHASILEA : He wears mail under his silk as a protection against steel, and never touches meat or wine without a venom-taster.

GUIDO : What's that ?

[*He looks sharply at* SINIBALDI, *who has also made a movement of dismay.* PANTHASILEA *observes one and the other.*

PANTHASILEA : Last night, myself, I was appointed to that office. He constrained me to it before he would drink a cup of wine I offered him. He takes no chances.

GUIDO (*bewildered*) : You ! He made you his venom-taster, do you say ?

PANTHASILEA : Yes.

[GUIDO *considers her a moment with dilating eyes. Then deliberately he sheathes his dagger.*

GUIDO : Now I understand why God has willed that you should come back, despite your load of shame.

SINIBALDI : Eh ?

GUIDO : It is so that you may be his venom-taster once again, to-night.

[SINIBALDI *audibly sucks in his breath. He would intervene, but controls himself.*

[*There is a tense pause.* PANTHASILEA, *looking at her father, at* SINIBALDI *and finally at the cup with which she has seen him tampering, realizes all. There is from her a flash of inspiration, almost instantly veiled. She smiles a little at last, but with more mockery than mirth.*

[*Martial music is heard faintly in the distance and rapidly approaching.*

PANTHASILEA : I understand, I think. So be it. It is very . . . just.

[SINIBALDI, *who has been showing constraint, breathes freely again.*

SINIBALDI : And very timely. They are returning.

[GUIDO *sinks limply into a chair, his head in his hands.* PANTHASILEA *turns slowly, and goes up and out into the half-gloom of the loggia, where she remains standing, looking out.*

[SINIBALDI *approaches* GUIDO, *and touches his shoulder.*

SINIBALDI : Come, brace yourself, Lord Count. You have a part to play.

GUIDO : A part ! Lord of Heaven ! What part is mine ?

SINIBALDI : A Roman part.

GUIDO (*bitterly*) : Written by a Venetian. Pah !

[*The main doors are thrown open.* MACCHIAVELLI, CAPELLO, GASPARO *and* MARIANO *come in. The music swells up, now close at hand.*

[TWO LACKEYS *enter from above door right, with tapers, and light the lanterns to dispel the gathering dusk.*

[GUIDO *rises to receive the orators, controlling himself.*

GUIDO : Sirs, you are well returned.

CAPELLO : You missed a very impressive ceremony. But it was kind of you, Lord Prince, to bear Count Guido company. Courage, Lord Count. After all, you retain your vicarship.

GUIDO (*impatiently*) : Where is his highness ?

MACCHIAVELLI : He follows.

CAPELLO : Here he comes.

[FOUR SWISS *enter and take up their stations inside the door. Then comes* VALENTINOIS, *preceded immediately in single file by* CORELLA, RAMIREZ *and* FERRANTE, *and followed by two pages.* VALENTINOIS

takes off his steel cap and then the velvet skull-cap under it. These he hands to one of the pages, who sets them down. Then VALENTINOIS *comes forward, ungloving, raking the room with his glance, which finally settles on* SINIBALDI.

VALENTINOIS: Ah, Lord Prince! We missed your company in the Cathedral.

[*At the sound of his voice* PANTHASILEA *wheels about, a hand clutching her agitated bosom.*

SINIBALDI: I was none so well, highness, and Venice was well represented by Messer Capello.

VALENTINOIS (*nodding*): Who will report to the Serene Republic this happy conclusion of our campaign.

SINIBALDI: The Serene Republic will rejoice in this.

VALENTINOIS (*dryly*): I know.

SINIBALDI: And she will commend your generous wisdom in the matter of Count Guido.

VALENTINOIS: To merit the approval of the Most Serene is more than a reward. It leaves me in her debt—and in yours, Lord Prince. I shall study to repay. I always pay my debts. But come, sirs. To table! I have a long journey before me for to-morrow, and so I must early to bed.

[*He turns, and so confronts* PANTHASILEA, *who is standing in the loggia. He starts at sight of her. Recovering, he speaks calmly, in greeting, bowing low.*

VALENTINOIS: Monna Panthasilea! My homage. I had not dared to hope that you would grace our company to-night.

[*He extends his hand. She hesitates a moment, then comes forward, and kisses it, curtsying.*

[*Retaining her hand, he turns to lead her to a place beside his own.*

VALENTINOIS : Come, then. To table ! You, madonna, here on my right.

PANTHASILEA : I am here to discharge the office to which your highness has appointed me.

VALENTINOIS : Office ?

PANTHASILEA : Venom-taster to your potency.

[VALENTINOIS' *eyes quicken suddenly. They flash upon* COUNT GUIDO *and from him to* SINIBALDI, *both of whom betray constraint. Then he looks steadily at* PANTHASILEA.

VALENTINOIS : That is to take a jest too seriously.

PANTHASILEA : No office in the service of your potency can be taken as a jest.

VALENTINOIS : Certainly not that one. It is no sinecure to be venom-taster to Cesare Borgia. It has its risks, madonna.

GUIDO : Not here, my lord.

VALENTINOIS : Could I suggest it ? I could no more suspect your lordship than I could suspect . . . say, Prince Sinibaldi, who represents a State that loves and honours me, or this sombre Macchiavelli, who strictly confines himself to poisoning minds.

MACCHIAVELLI : I thank your highness for the compliment.

VALENTINOIS : There was none intended. But be seated, pray. You, here beside me, Ser Niccolò ; then Ramirez ; you, Lord Prince, there, and Micheletto yonder. Messeri Capello, Gasparo and Mariano here on my left. You, Lord Count, up there, where you can command your seneschal. Be seated, pray.

[*All sit.*

[*The* FOUR SWISS *remain on guard, two on each side of the closed doors,* FERRANTE *between them.*

VALENTINOIS: It is regrettable that the only lady present should remain standing by virtue of her office. But since you insist, madonna, I'll not deny myself the honour you would pay me, all unworthy though I account myself.

[*He sits.* PANTHASILEA *remains standing behind him and a little to his right.*

[*The* SENESCHAL *comes in L., ushering two lackeys with dishes of risotto; two other lackeys follow with jugs of wine; the* SENESCHAL, *himself, carries a jug. For a moment there is the bustle of preparation, and a general hum of talk. Then* VALENTINOIS *leans forward to address* SINIBALDI, *and all fall silent.*

VALENTINOIS: You are pale, Lord Prince.

SINIBALDI: Your highness honours me by your attention. I have said that I am none so well.

VALENTINOIS: You should study your health, sir. In you the Most Serene would lose a precious servant, and I a valued friend.

SINIBALDI: Your highness overwhelms me.

[*A lackey is pouring wine for* SINIBALDI.

[*At the same moment the* SENESCHAL *approaches* VALENTINOIS *to pour for him from his own special jug.* VALENTINOIS *prevents him, by covering the chalice with his hand.*

VALENTINOIS: Wait! I'll drink from the same jug as the prince. I have a pledge for him, and it is proper we should drink it in one wine.

[*To the servant who has poured for* SINIBALDI.

VALENTINOIS: You there!

[*The* SERVANT *approaches him.* VALENTINOIS *uncovers his chalice.*]

VALENTINOIS: Pour.

[*The* SERVANT *fills* VALENTINOIS' *cup, whilst the latter covertly watches* SINIBALDI, *who cannot repress a smile at the futile precaution. He half sneers as he says:*

SINIBALDI : Your highness takes no risks.

VALENTINOIS : That is why I am alive. I drink to you, Lord Prince, and to the illustrious State you represent so worthily.

[*He raises his cup.* SINIBALDI *does the same. Slowly, his eyes ever on* SINIBALDI, VALENTINOIS *carries the cup towards his lips. He is about to drink.*

PANTHASILEA : I have not tasted for your magnificence.

[VALENTINOIS *checks, the cup almost at his lips. Very slowly, he half lowers it.*

VALENTINOIS : That ceremony is surely idle. But so are many. Let us preserve the forms.

[*He sets the cup down. She takes it, raises it, and slowly drinks.*

[VALENTINOIS *does not look round, but is intently watching* SINIBALDI, *who, almost despite himself, in his rage and excitement, makes a half-movement to warn or to check. But finding* VALENTINOIS' *eyes upon him, he instantly suppresses it.*

[PANTHASILEA *sets down the cup which she has emptied.*

[*His stare demands an explanation of the act.*

PANTHASILEA : I . . . I thirsted, highness.

VALENTINOIS : Thirsted! But . . . to drain my cup . . . to the last drop . . .

PANTHASILEA : It was . . . unwarrantable. I . . . I ask your pardon. I will repair the fault. I . . .

[*She falters. Her senses swim, but from emotion rather than the working of the poison. She swings half round and away to the right, gasping a little.*

[VALENTINOIS *sits frozen. As he fits together the last pieces of the puzzle and discovers the whole truth at last, understanding, amazement and horror transform his countenance. There is a sudden reaction in his mind, a sudden sloughing of his monstrous egotism, reflected in his awe-stricken face.*

PANTHASILEA : Air ! Air ! God ! Give me air !

[VALENTINOIS *bounds up, his voice vibrant with real passion and grief.*

VALENTINOIS : Panthasilea ! Panthasilea !

[*He catches her in his arms, as she staggers in danger of falling.*

[*All rise, save* GUIDO, *who remains seated, his head in his hands, utterly crushed, almost insensible.*

[VALENTINOIS *raves wildly on, his whole manner changed to reflect the sudden revulsion in his soul.*

VALENTINOIS : Lea ! The wine was poisoned, and you knew it. You drained the cup to save me. Lea !

[*She breathes hard in his arms, but makes no answer. Holding her, he swings to his* SWISS, *and with one hand points to* SINIBALDI.

VALENTINOIS : Seize me that Venetian dog ! Make him fast !

[SINIBALDI *attempts to draw his dagger. But his arms are instantly seized by* CORELLA *and* RAMIREZ, *who are on either side of him. They promptly disarm him, and surrender him to the* SWISS, *who have leapt forward.*

VALENTINOIS : Ah ! You show an odd readiness to handle steel, now that your poison has missed its mark.

SINIBALDI : Highness, I protest against this violence !

CAPELLO (*in flabby agitation*) : As do I, magnificent, in the name of the Most Serene.

VALENTINOIS : Cease, fool ! Do you bleat your threats at me ?

[*Half carrying, half supporting* PANTHASILEA, VALENTINOIS *conducts her to the chair right of table, lately vacated by* SINIBALDI. *He stands looking at her in anguish a moment.*

SINIBALDI : Your exalted potency is overlooking something, I think. I am an ambassador, and my person is inviolable. I am Prince Sinibaldi, Envoy of Venice.

VALENTINOIS (*frenziedly*) : If you were Prince Lucifer, Envoy of Hell, you should still pay for this.

SINIBALDI : Your potency dares to say that I . . .

VALENTINOIS : Fool ! Will you prevaricate upon the very threshold of Eternity ? For that is where you stand. . . . Unless you can repair what you have done. . . . Your life for hers. That is my offer. Give me the antidote —the antidote to your Venetian poison, and you shall have your filthy life.

[PANTHASILEA, *moved by his passionate frenzy, looks up ; and though her laboured breathing shows her extremity, she smiles.*

SINIBALDI : I have no antidote. I know nothing of poison—if poison it be by which she is stricken. As for your threats—for any violence to me, you will be called to render a strict account to Venice.

VALENTINOIS (*in a voice of thunder*) : And I will render it. But though her legions were already at my gates, though my ruin were assured, I should not spare you now.

CAPELLO : In Heaven's name, magnificent !

VALENTINOIS (*heedlessly, indicating Sinibaldi*) : Take him away ! Give him a priest, and then a rope—and so, let him face his Maker.

SINIBALDI : You seal your own doom with mine.

VALENTINOIS : Take him away ! You have my orders.

[*The* SWISS *lead* SINIBALDI *up and out.*

CAPELLO (*quavering*) : Highness ! Highness ! Bethink you ! This will mean war.

VALENTINOIS: I'll welcome it. Begone! Micheletto, clear the room. Sirs, you have leave to go! Ramirez, a doctor! Bestir, man! Quick! in Heaven's name!

[RAMIREZ *plunges out, the ambassadors following.* CORELLA *touches* GUIDO'S *shoulder. The latter rises, looks wildly round, and turns as if to go towards* PANTHASILEA. VALENTINOIS *waves him back.*

VALENTINOIS: Go, sir! Go! You are her father. I will not ask what part you had in this. But go.

[GUIDO *goes out L. with* CORELLA.

[VALENTINOIS *turns again to* PANTHASILEA, *who is leaning back with closed eyes. He kneels beside her.*

VALENTINOIS: Lea! Lea! Speak to me, Lea!

[*She opens her eyes, considers his grief-stricken face, and smiles wistfully.*

PANTHASILEA: My lord!

VALENTINOIS: O God of Heaven! Where is now my boasted might? I would give all that I have won at so much cost for just the power to stay your ebbing life. Lea, forgive! Had I but known, had I but dreamed your worth . . .

PANTHASILEA: I was the agent of a vile betrayal, and you knew me to be that. But I have made amends . . .

VALENTINOIS: Amends! Oh! (*In a sudden frenzy, leaping up.*) Where is this doctor? Will he never come?

PANTHASILEA: Let be. There is no doctor that can help me now.

VALENTINOIS: Lea! My poor murdered love!

PANTHASILEA (*eagerly*): Say that again, my lord. . . . Say that again!

VALENTINOIS: My love! My love!

PANTHASILEA (*smiling*): So you have come to love me a little at the last? I am content, Valentinois. Do you

remember how I begged in vain last night that you should speak that little word that would have healed my shame ? You would not. You would not lie. So if you say it now . . . it must be true.

VALENTINOIS : If it could avail I would give my life to prove it. Why have I found you but to lose you again ? You drank that poisoned wine to save me—me ! Why ?

PANTHASILEA : The lust of the conquest ! To hear you say what you have said.

VALENTINOIS : Was so much needed to accomplish that ?

PANTHASILEA : It was. You deemed me just a treacherous wanton. How else could I give proof ? Would anything less have made you believe in me ? Would anything less have conquered you ?

VALENTINOIS : It is a conquest that must break me if you leave me now. (*He takes her up in his arms. He holds her now, crushing her to him.*) Stay with me, Lea —O pitying Heaven !—stay !

PANTHASILEA : Thus did I plead with you last night, as passionately and as vainly. Thus did I beg you to stay. You would not then, and now I . . . I cannot.

[*He kisses her. She smiles.*

PANTHASILEA : But this time . . . we part . . . friends . . . lovers. . . . (*On a sudden alarmed outcry.*) Valentinois !

VALENTINOIS : Lea !

PANTHASILEA : It is growing dark. . . . It . . .

[*A long fluttering sigh escapes her. She makes a convulsive movement. Her head falls back. She is dead.*

[*A moment he holds her yet. Then gently he lowers her into the chair again.*

[*He kneels beside her. He speaks in a suffocated voice.*

VALENTINOIS: Ay, you have conquered now!

[*A sob bursts from him. His head sinks on to the arm he is resting on the table's edge.*

[*A trumpet is heard in the distance, and faintly thereafter the sound of march music.*

SLOW CURTAIN

END OF PLAY

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